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l Sharma

My Years in a Pakistani Prison

The Untold Story of Kishorilal alias Amarik Singh alias Saleem, an Indian Spy in Pakistan

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He was called for his service to the motherland. He reciprocated immediately. Giving up all familial relationships, he partook in a rigorous training programme that was a true test of his heart, body, mind and soul. Fighting off his cowardly hopes of quitting the organization so as to avoid the ordeal, he was finally made battle ready.

Slipped into enemy territory, his espionage attempts met with complete success. However luck soon turned against him, as during his third mission he was seized by the enemy camp and imprisoned. He was subjected to absolute third degree torture and only miraculously, and albeit divinely, escaped the contours of death on more that one occasion.

But he continued to strive towards seeing his own country once again. He looked forward to coming back home. And one day, God gave him that chance. He returned to the border once again, so that he could be united with his fellow countrymen.
Was the welcome given to him befitting that of a hero? Or even if not a hero's welcome, certainly he needn't have been treated like a blackguard, a traitor!

Who was he after all a Spy, or a Soldier?

My Years in a Pakistani Prison

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The Untold Story of Kishorilal alias Amarik Singh alias Saleem, an Indian Spy in Pakistan

Kishorilal Sharma

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PREFACE

This is the story of the most eventful period of my life from 1966 to 1976. The decade was also most tumultuous and turbulent. I joined the MI (Military Intelligence wing of the Indian army) in 1965 and after a brief stint of training was sent by my employers to Pakistan a number of times on a variety of assignments or missions. The first three assignments were successful in the sense that I completed the given tasks, crossed back into India and submitted the information gathered during my stay in Pakistan to the concerned officers of the MI in Jullundur. My fourth assignment proved to be disastrous, as I and a colleague, Gulzar Masih, who had also crossed over along with me were captured by the FIU (Field Intelligence Unit) of Pakistan on 18th September 1966 at Kasoor in Pakistani Punjab. After being lodged in the lockup of Kasoor Police Station overnight, I was shifted to a number of places which included some quarter guards of the Pakistani Army at undisclosed locations and finally the underground cells in the Shahi Quila at Lahore. During my custody in the Army's quarter guards as well as the Shahi Quila, I was subjected to the most inhuman and unspeakable tortures by the interrogators, after which the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Kasoor sentenced me to two years rigorous imprisonment (RI) for illegal border crossing and a Field General Court Martial (FGCM) handed down another sentence of 10 years' RI for violation of some unspecified provisions of the Official Secrets Act of Pakistan.

I was repatriated to India after eight years, on 18th September, 1974, on account of an agreement reached between the Governments of India and Pakistan for exchange of prisoners held in each other's country prior to the 1971 war.

I could have written this book immediately after my repatriation in 1976 but didn't do so because of two reasons. First, soon after my return some personnel from the MI detachment at Jullundur would visit my place and threaten me with the dire consequences for my entire family if I dared to make public my links with MI or my experiences in Pakistan. Second, there was a lot of bitterness in

my mind not only against those who tormented me while in custody in Pakistan but also those who lured me into joining the MI back home. The bitterness was so overpowering that an objective account of the events would not have been possible and truth would have been a casualty. The bitterness has died down almost completely because of sheer flux of time and I have tried to narrate the experience with absolute objectivity—seeing the events and interpreting them not as a participant, but as a dispassionate bystander.

Questions about the objective and relevance for writing the book may be fully called for. In fact I was the first one to put those questions to myself before venturing to write. Life in agencies like the MI is shrouded in mystery. While a certain amount of secrecy may be a professional requirement in the interest of the security of the nation, sometimes the secrecy is used as a protective shield for activities that may not be compatible with the declared objectives of the organization. In a way the weapon of secrecy is also used to victimize operatives like me. To the extent possible and permissible I have tried to unveil the mystery about life inside these agencies. The treatment of detainees held on charges of spying is also not known to the outside world. I have tried to elaborate on this by narrating the horrifying experiences I had in person.

One significant aspect of my experience in the jails and other custodial facilities of Pakistan was that even in the worst of places one can find some extraordinarily good human beings. It was at the notorious interrogation chamber in Lahore's Shahi Quila that I came across an Assistant Sub-Inspector of Pakistani Police, Malik Mohammad Akram, who risking his job walked into my cell one night and told me to recite a short, two line prayer in praise of the divine mother (*Jaga Janani*) that could lessen the pangs of torture being inflicted upon me by his colleagues. The prayer was told to ASI Akram by his mother Shanti Devi, a Hindu by birth who converted to Islam at the time of partition and married Akram's father, a Muslim who had no objection to Shanti Devi continuing to worship the divine mother even after her conversion to Islam and marriage to a devout Muslim. In Mianwali Jail, a Pakistani prisoner Bashir Ahmad of Sargodha presented to me a 'Gutkha' of the Guru Granth sahab that belonged to his late father, a Sikh by birth, who converted to Islam and remained in Pakistan at the time of partition. Sheikh Ehsan Ghani,

the Superintendent of Multan Central Jail saved the lives of nearly two dozen Indian prisoners including me when a trigger happy commander of the Pakistani rangers wanted to shoot us all down by opening machine gun fire on the pretext of quelling a riot in the jail. "Over my dead body," was the firm assertion of Sheikh Ehsan Ghani who actually blocked the barrel of the machine gun by standing in front of it and declaring that as his prisoners we were under his protection and a true Muslim protects even at the cost of his life those who are under his care. The list could be very long and as you go through the book you will come across wonderful people like Gulkhan Pathan, Baba Sher and Umarkhan to name just a few. The book will thus help break some of the stereotypes normally entertained about our brethren across the border.

I have been a humble operative of an intelligence agency. I have neither had, nor could afford to have any political ambitions. Like all other middle class Indians I am basically apolitical. Whatever has been stated in the chapter entitled "Some Insights Into Real Politik' and the subsequent two chapters is a mere restatement of whatever I gathered from some of the politically active Pakistani inmates I met in Mianwali and Multan Jails and should not be construed as a sign of my own political agenda, as I have none. The only agenda I have is to draw the attention of the powers that be to the plight of intelligence operatives like me who are left to fend for themselves whenever in the course of due discharge of their duties they are faced with crises that are not of their own making. The book may appear to be India specific as I was an Indian operative, but if conditions of operatives are the same in other countries I shall be only too glad if the book could be equally useful for my counterparts from agencies the world over.

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I also thank Sh. Shaik Ehsan Ghani (Superintendent, Central Jail Multan) who saved our lives from the bullet of Pakistanis Rangers during the riots in Multan Central Jail and thank all my co-prisoners who spent their hard & intolerable period with me in Pakistani Jails.

AUTHOR

Introduction

"The last profession I would choose for myself would be spying. The last country I would choose to enter as a spy would be Pakistan"— Kushwant Singh.

These above words from his book "Under the Shadow of Bayonet and Bars" has inspired me to write some words from my life and experience with the moral support, guidance and inspiration Hon'ble Shri. N.N. Ojha, Director, Defence Estates, Ministry of Defence and my younger brother, Shri Mohinder.

We were the nation's eyes and ears in Pakistan at a crucial period in the history of 1965, when the two countries went for war twice within 6 years. We unofficial spies (because all the jobs related with spies were not official throughout the world) risked their youthfull skin to fetch classified and important information and help build an intelligence network in Pakistan. We all spent years in Pakistan prisons undergoing torture and humiliation at the hands of the enemy. We would be recruited by the Military or Police Intelligence establishment and therefore, think that we had earned a respectable place for ourself. But think again, as you find out that we are still fighting for one recognition as soldiers who fought for our motherland.

A spy's active life is an average of 3 years. Such is the risk associated with the job that an agent cover is bound to be at the bottom, sooner or later. The Indian Intelligence Agency of course were not expected to publically acknowledge these spies or men. But atleast the authority and intelligence agency should have kept their word on helping out their families and rehabilitate them through unofficial means. And there are huge unofficial funds with these agencies that are provided by the Govt. for their operation and other assignments.

Imagine being on the edge 24 x 7, where the difference between life and slow torture death is simply your presence of mind and a large slice of luck. Imagine

being smuggled into Pakistan with the mission of gathering classified and important information of Military details, knowing that our one false step or a single stroke of bad luck can send you to the depths of hell.

Indian agents who spy in Pakistan did not have to imagine all these. They live like an entire generation of spies active in 1960 and 1970 and worked under conditions that could reduce lesser mortals to nerves wrecks. Remarkably they not only accomplished extremely sensitive talks, but also carried on working for many years.

Why would anyone opt for such a job? My answer is that money was a big factor in persuading people to take up spying in my time. Most of us were recruited in our early youths when the spirit of a adventure runs and responsibilities are minimal, Ofcourse there was also the feeling of doing something for our motherland.

It was a time when spying wants were technologically driven as it is today. When spy satellites and modem communications tools were at the command of the intelligence agency, in those times messages would be often be sent across to our superior through coded newspaper ads.

An agent would normally cross into Pakistan quickly, complete his mission and return in 15 days. Border crossings were done with the accompaniment of a guide who knew the area well. Some guides have legendary powers in crossing the border safely.

1

The Summer of 1965

It is more than forty years, but the summer of 1965 is still fresh in my mind and perhaps shall always remain so as long as I am alive. It has got itself etched in my mind permanently. I was then a sprightly young lad of 19, having first passed the ubiquitous 'matric' from one of the better schools in Jullundur, the Cantonment town in which my father, working for the Military Engineering Service was posted. I followed the Matriculation with a diploma course in automobile engineering from a private polytechnic college, named the UK Automobile Institute. Like any other 19 year old I too used to think most of the time about myself—what shall I become in life. I used to be day-dreaming most of the time, seeing myself through the eye of my mind, some times as a doctor with a stethoscope hanging rather casually around my collar and some times as an engineer standing at the 'site' donning a steel helmet in the middle of a huge workshed surrounded by as many machines as men, all looking up to me for guidance on what they should be doing or seeking my approval for what they had already done. At the end of each session of fantasy – and there were no less than some half a dozen such sessions each day – I would be left with clarity and confusion in equal measure. Clarity, that I would not be a doctor, but confusion whether I should be an engineer or an Army Officer. While the urge to become an engineer was perhaps inborn, it some how always got overshadowed with an equally strong urge to become an Army Officer that could perhaps be the result of the surroundings in which I was born and brought up. Well, we lived in a Cantonment town – Jullundur – where the air of authority and the pomp and show of an Army with more than three centuries of colonial legacy, and less than three decades of nationalist professionalism of the fledgling democracy of one of the poorest countries in the world, was a part of the air that

an inhabitant breathed. Jullundur being a 'border town' at the proverbial stone's throw from the only enemy India could think of then – Pakistan – the word 'Army' was perhaps the most electrifying for any young man on the verge of catapulting out of his teens. It was synonymous with, and no less sacred, than the only other equally electrifying word 'Patriotism'.

Like many young men of my age in those day, I was torn between the two ambitions of being an engineer or an Army officer. The engineer in me, was born with me and some astrologers would often tell my father that my horoscope left no doubt that I was born an engineer; but then the compulsions of my manly youthfulness would never let me believe that I had any less strong an urge to be an Army officer. I would not only not forgive myself but would also feel deeply ashamed if I were to have even an iota of doubt that I didn't want to join Army. I would often brood and pray for some miracle that could make things happen in such a way that my inborn urge of becoming an engineer and my youthful duty of joining the army could both be fulfilled together. And lo and behold, the miracle happened sooner than later.

Bhimsen was an impressive young man, but older than me. He lived in our neighborhood and would often visit my elder brother. I would every now and then ask my brother, "Bhimsen is a civilian apparently doing his own business in the city—how come he lives in this defence accommodation; is he a sub-lettee?" "He is not a sub-lettee, that much I know," my brother would say, "but how he got the accommodation even I don't know. He hasn't told me and doesn't even like being asked this question." One day Bhimsen dropped in. I came out to tell him that *Praji* (elder brother) was not at home. "But I have come to see you," Bhimsen said. "When I am not around you talk so much about me to your brother, now that I have come to see you, wont you like to talk to me?" I was as much foxed as thrilled. "Why not," I said, "come, I will help *maajee* make a cup of tea for you." "I have not come for a cup of tea," Bhimsen said in a rather business—like manner which was so unusual for him. "I have come to talk about something important to you; so let's sit down and get straight to the point."

"You've been wanting to know how, a civilian, live in this Cantonment accommodation," Bhimsen started in a rather somber tone. "Well I'll tell you something that even my friend, your elder brother doesn't know. Young man, I am not a civilian, I am an Army officer having the rank of a Captain, but my job is such that I have to keep my real identity secret, even from my own family. All Army officers serve the motherland, but I and a few others like me are the chosen ones whose service for mother India is special, extraordinary and unique. We are the faceless sons of mother India, who fight the enemy without any weapons, with the sheer strength of our spirit and our unflinching devotion to the motherland. The regular soldiers have peace times and war times, but for us there is no peace. We are at war with the enemy all the time." Bhimsen continued as if he had become a medium for some extra-terrestrial oracle.

A rainbow of feelings crossed my mind leaving me amused, impressed, confused and above all, overawed. "But Bhim praji," I asked rather nervously, "if you haven't told these things even to my elder brother who is your friend, why are you telling all this to me?" Bhimsen's voice got deeper this time sounding like a man possessed. "Listen Kishori," he said with an air of self styled but almost absolute authority, "what I am going to tell you now, I don't want even *you* to tell any one on earth including your family members; not even to my friend, your elder brother. Kishori, I want you to be one of the chosen few like me and do some thing spectacular for mother India. I'll try and get you inducted into that very special branch of the Army in which I work and get you the rank of a Captain right at the start. And mind you Kishori, it is only those who are chosen by God who get a chance to serve the motherland in this extraordinary manner. I consider myself divinely blessed to have been selected for a career in this branch of the Army and have no doubt that you too will have your share of this divine grace because of which I have felt inspired to share my deepest secrets with you and invite you to be one of us." "But Bhim praji" I replied nervously, "I'm not quite sure whether I would prefer a career in the army more than the career as an engineer. In fact, some times I feel quite clearly that my heart is craving for an engineer's job more than an Army officer's."

"Don't be silly Kishori! I know you are torn between the two ideas and are confused whether to opt for the Army or an engineer's job. In fact I know your dilemma so well that I have thought of a job for you where you will be able to combine both. You will be an army officer working on projects that will be directly connected with your engineering diploma. The branch of Army in which I work and want to induct you has lot of specialized assignments for engineers and you will be given only such assignments." Now this was my turn to be completely bowled over by Bhimsen's smartness. I almost instantaneously believed that he had something superhuman about himself and he was right when he said that those who got selected for the branch of the Army in which he worked were actually a divinely blessed lot. How otherwise did he know that I was torn between the two ambitions of joining the Army or becoming an engineer? After all these were thoughts lodged in the deepest recesses of my mind and I hadn't shared these even with my elder brother who was the only member of our family to whom Bhimsen used to talk. My decision was already made. I shall join the branch of Army that Bhimsen worked for and was inviting me to join. I had also decided that I shall not disclose any thing about this to any one on earth, including my family members until and unless Bhimsen gave the clearance. After all it was a divine call for an extraordinary career in some spectacular service of mother India and Bhimsen was the chosen medium for conveying the call to me. Bhimsen knew that my mind was already made up. "OK then Kishori," he said, "I shall come to you after about a week or so and the two of us will then go to my office. I am sure you will be selected almost the moment the CO (commanding officer) sees you."

"But why after a week or so, why not tomorrow itself," I said, unable to hide my impatience to which Bhimsen replied in with an emotionless chill in his voice. "Why tomorrow Kishori, if I want I can take you right now, straightway to the CO and get your appointment order. But I will do it after at least a week because I want to see whether you can keep the secret from everybody including your family during this period. Ability to keep secrets is the key to success in our job and I want to see your capacity to keep secrets. This is the first test of your aptitude for the job and we'll move further only if you pass this. If you fail, the chapter is closed and in that

case I didn't meet or talk anything with you. But even if you fail Kishori, remember one thing, whatever I have talked to you shall always remain a secret buried in your heart. If that comes out, perhaps you cannot imagine how unpleasant the call of duty could be for me in that case. For the sake of our motherland we have to do so many things on a number of occasions which for a common man could be quite horrendous, sinful, even amounting to committing a crime."

"I have made up my mind Bhim praji," I said resolutely, "and you will see that I will not fail in my first test." For a long time after Bhimsen had left I kept wondering whether the commitment I gave him was a show of bravado or an outcome of fear due to the chilling warnings held out by him. Lost in these thoughts I was waiting for the D-day when Bhimsen would be taking me to the CO for an appointment in that extraordinary branch of the Army in which only the chosen few are lucky to serve, whose faceless soldiers serve the mother land without any weapons or armory and who, unlike the ordinary soldiers, never have any peace time.

2

Bhimsen Comes Calling

Bhimsen came earlier than expected. He had promised to me that he would come after a week so that he could test my ability to keep secrets for a sustained duration even from my own family; but he landed in our house exactly on the third day. It was a little late as a hot sultry day was about to melt into a pleasant and cool evening, something so common during summers in any north Indian city or town. I don't remember exactly which day of the week it was, except that it was a holiday for all offices of the Government because of which my whole family – parents, brothers and sisters had gone to our native village 'Nanda Chour' in the adjoining District of Hoshiarpur on our (Indian) side of the Punjab. When my father asked me to come along I feigned sickness and refused, but the real reason why I didn't go was my blind, incessant obsession with the dreams about the new job Bhimsen had promised me. I had already started seeing myself as the chosen one who was about to join that divinely blessed group of the rarest of rare sons of mother India, an extraordinary soldier who was perpetually at war with the enemy without any arms or ammunition and for whom there was no 'peace time'. "So what if the soldier was to be unsung and unseen during his lifetime," I started talking almost loudly to myself, "when his deeds are made public posthumously he is going to be the darling of everybody and a role model for the youth of the county." I was already seeing young boys pinning and young girls clutching behind their duck downing filled imported pillows my life size posters – a straight, stiff neck with chin high and dark, thick sunglasses – hiding behind them the mystique of my impressive personality and deeply piercing eye, much the same way in which I had kept hidden from my family the secret of what Bhimsen had offered to me or the response I had given to him.

My late evening dream was broken abruptly by Bhimsen's sudden arrival right into the room which I generally shared with my elder brother. "Shall we go to meet the CO saab," Bhimsen asked in a business—like manner without wasting any time on any pleasantries or formalities. I was stunned and surprised; stunned because of his sudden arrival, abruptly breaking my dream sequence and surprised because what was settled earlier was that the visit to the CO shall be after a week. Bhimsen was smart enough to have read my feelings and unilaterally volunteered the requisite clarifications. "Look Kishori," he said with the air of authority he already seemed to have firmly established over me, "I had told you that I would come after a week because I wanted to see your ability to keep secrets from those you consider closest to yourself. I thought the test might take one week but ever since I talked to you three days back I have been meeting your elder brother everyday and asking him about your future plans and your brother has been telling me that he knows nothing. I even prodded your brother by telling him that if a younger brother doesn't confide in the elder it reflects badly of the elder, to which your brother said that you were quite open with him till recently but God knows what has made you completely clamped up for the last 3-4 days. I saw no point wasting more time as you had already passed the test. And then Kishori there is another reason why I came earlier than you expected," Bhimsen said as if he were a schoolteacher and I his pet pupil. "You know surprise is no less important in our job than a secret. Keeping secrets is a part of the job and giving surprises a part of the training. You can therefore presume that by giving you this surprise I have already started the process of your training."

Once again I felt confused. Bhimsen had told me to keep our entire conversation secret from everyone at home, but the way he had come and was talking openly he seemed to be risking a leak. After all he didn't know that my family had gone to our native village. In fact no one knew as the program was made quite suddenly. I decided to confront and asked him what was troubling my mind. Bhimsen replied like a serious professor of some reputed college or university. "Well this is the second step of your training. I thought I shall explain it to you later but as you have asked it in the very beginning I don't want to keep you guessing. You know Kishori, if a chap from the MI can watch without being watched he can never fail in his

mission. I have been watching you for the last six months ever since you passed that diploma in Automobiles, but I made sure that no one watched me or knew my real mission in visiting your house so frequently. In fact everyone in your family thought I was a friend of your elder brother and that was about all. I continued my watch on your family or rather intensified it after I opened up with you and have been carefully noticing who visits your house when and for how long. Without being noticed, I have been keeping all information about when, where and for how long you or any member of your family go out. In fact within minutes of your family deciding to go for a weekend to Nandachur I had come to know of it and when I came to know that you are opting out of the trip I could guess why you had done so. I've also been noticing who all are the chaps you or other members of your family meet and for what purpose. These things are essential as it is I who would be responsible for whatever good or bad happens to the organization because of your selection. If you ever double cross or even think of double crossing the MI, I must know where to look for you and who are the others for whom to look for so that no harm comes to the motherland because of me or because of the chap I recommend for selection." Bhimsen ended the conversation once again by reminding how glorious the 'organization' was and how prestigious it was to be part of it. "It is not as simple as selection to the ordinary branches of the Army Kishori, the branch I am in and you are about to get in is extraordinary," Bhimsen concluded. What Bhimsen said made me quite happy. If my training had already started then sure enough my selection was as good as done.

Because of a sudden rush of currents and cross currents of thoughts, I forgot to ask Bhimsen for a glass of water, a cup of tea or even offer him a chair to sit. When I realized the indiscretion I apologetically asked him if he would care for some tea, coffee or 'thandi bottle' (cold drink). "No," said Bhimsen in a business— like manner and went on to add, "you better get ready, I've already fixed an appointment with the CO *saab* for you and he is waiting in the office... so let's move fast." When I asked Bhimsen where exactly was the office he avoided giving a direct answer and simply said, "in any case we are going there only and you will see it for yourself." Before I could react, he asked me to jump on the pillion of his old, noisy but sturdy looking bike and soon he zoomed out of our house as if on a flying

machine taking me once again into my world of dreams where I didn't exist as Kishori and Bhimsen didn't exist as Bhimsen. What existed were a pair of James Bonds who had changed their names to Kishori and Bhimsen simply because they were spies and no one was supposed to know who they really were.

3

CO Saab and Ustadji

Bhimsen zoomed past the small row of barracks by our house and stopped in front of a modest residence forming part of a cluster of houses with a signage 'JCO Qrs'. He parked his bike in front of the last house in the row and rushed in hurriedly almost dragging me along. The house was modestly furnished with only the 'basic furniture items' of the MES, a common site in any military or defence civilian household in any cantonment in India or for that matter – as I was to see for myself later – even in Pakistan. The house was dimly lit and filled with an eerie silence; perhaps the occupant lived single without his family. Being the last (corner) house in the row it was next to a small, narrow road leading to the MES pump house that I was quite familiar with. Leaving me alone in the front room Bhimsen accompanied the occupant of the house towards the backyard. I could see them vaguely talking to each other in hushed voices. Even though I couldn't listen to anything clearly I could guess from the way Bhimsen was looking at me intermittently that the conversation was about me. I could also sniff intuitively that the context in which I might be figuring out their conversation was not very happy or at least agreeable.

After some time Bhimsen came to me and said apologetically – so unusual for him – that because of official compulsions it had become absolutely essential to put me to a little bit of inconvenience and asked if I would be willing to face the same. It was very hot and sweaty and already very late in the evening. The thick darkness had descended all over like a pall of gloom and the manner in which Bhimsen and the JCO talked to each other in hush-hush tones made me uncomfortable from within. I asked Bhimsen rather weakly what exactly was the matter. Nothing much said Bhimsen. "Just try to understand. I know you very well and can vouch for you at any time or any place, but the CO saab and the Ustadji (I

now knew that the occupant of the house was 'Ustadji' about whom Bhimsen had talked to me a couple of times earlier in brief) do not know you as yet. Problem is Kishori that as per rules no outsider is supposed to know the location of the CO *saab's* office and we do not want to give a wrong impression to the CO *saab* about you in your very first meeting with him by breaking the rule. You know Kishori, generally when we take a person for the first time to the CO *saab's* office we have to take him blind-folded." Then almost immediately sniffing that I wasn't quite amused with the idea, Bhimsen burst into a barrage of explanations with a liberal mix of apologies. As Bhimsen was speaking almost non-stop, Ustadji suddenly pounced on me and tied what felt like black scarf made of a coarse cloth on my eyes with the swiftness of a falcon pouncing on an unsuspecting prey. I suddenly felt that the darkness had become thicker than I had ever experienced in life and had the strange feeling of my whole body becoming cold in spite of the 40^0 plus temperature outside.

For the first time since Bhimsen had taken me into confidence about his job and my future, I felt nervous, disgusted and scared. Scores of questions crossed my mind at once in one go. Is Bhimsen actually an officer of the MI or he is a criminal out to lure unsuspecting boys like me into some kind of a sinister game? Did I commit a mistake by relying upon him and keeping even my parents and my elder brother in the dark about my secret dealings with him? If something happens to me how will my parents come to know where and how I was? What will be the condition of my parents, brothers and sisters if I just go missing with no clue available to them about my whereabouts or, worse still, if I am ultimately found to be in an undesirable state of affairs? Ever since Bhimsen made me agree to join the MI as an officer, there were only two motivating factors in my mind; first, the extraordinary service of the motherland and second, to make my parents and my family feel proud of me. What an anticlimax it would be, I thought if instead of bringing glory to the family I end up bringing disgrace. I knew my father very well. He was a modest man with limited ambitions but very high level of sensitivity about his personal honor and the dignity of the family in his circle of friends. I knew that he could stoically face the news of my death in the service of the motherland but would almost instantaneously think of committing suicide

if told that I, his son, so dear to him had been found to be involved in some thing which could be called bad, undesirable or nefarious. I was so completely lost in my thoughts that I didn't even notice that I had been already shoved in the rear of the jeep which 'Ustadji' had started driving with Bhimsen sitting by my side, pinning me down to the floor in the rear of the jeep. "What are you mumbling Kishori?" Bhimsen said loudly as if trying to wake me up from deep sleep. "Didn't I tell you it is nothing more than a simple procedural requirement for those who are taken to the CO's office for the first time? Why can't you take it easy? This is not going to happen whenever you go or are taken to the office in future, so just relax," Bhimsen finished as abruptly as he had started.

The jeep was slowing down as if rhythmically in tune with Bhimsen's speech and quite coincidentally stopped just as Bhimsen had finished speaking to me. I could hear the thud of Bhimsen jumping out and then softly raising me from the metal floor of the jeep, pulling my hand and at the same time asking me to jump out. I obeyed silently. Bhimsen caught my hand and started walking up a few steps. I felt we crossed through a large hall so common in the old colonial type bungalows in the Cantonments. After crossing the hall we perhaps entered a verandah, took a quick left turn and entered what could be felt by me as a small, stuffy room with the fresh fragrance of recently sprayed lavender rather thickly. The fragrance of the spray was interspersed with the smell of alcohol and I could guess that some one in the room was taking the most popular drink in Indian Army—XXX Rum. I felt a pair of heavy and scruffy hands approaching the back of my forehead and before my mind could be filled with a fresh wave of fear I found the blind-fold being removed with the same speed with which it was tied. Yes, it was a black scarf as I had been guessing ever since it was tied across my eyes. For a moment I forgot the trauma I had been undergoing and started feeling pleased with myself for the sharpness with which I could guess things correctly even when blind-folded.

It was a small room as stuffy as I had guessed by the very feel of it when we had entered. It looked elegant with wood paneled walls, ostentatious furniture and an expensive looking mirror. It was thickly carpeted from wall to wall but the most elegant part of the room was a rather oversized vertical Venetian blind that camouflaged a huge window, to the left of an office table and a chair because of

which alone perhaps the room qualified to be called an office. I saw an average looking person of medium built and wheatish complexion, so common for any north Indian male, standing in the center of the space that divided the office table and the chair. I guessed he was the CO *saab* I had been hearing off for the last fortnight or so. The man didn't look at me at first as his face was turned towards the window at which he was staring incessantly, occasionally opening and closing the blinds and tilting towards the window to look outside like a child playing hide and seek. In the center of the table was a half open file lying upside down and by its side was a book, spread open from the middle with the front and the back cover pointing upwards. It looked like one of those potboilers sold from the pavements. At the extreme right end of the table was a glass half filled perhaps with rum.

Bhimsen, Ustadji and myself kept standing in front of the table for quite some time but our presence wasn't acknowledged by the CO who kept on staring at the vertical blinds and the window. After some time which looked like an eternity to me, the CO turned his face rightwards, picked up the glass, took a sip from it, looked at me, running his eyes from my head to feet as if trying to size me up, looked at Ustadji and Bhimsen one by one and finally opened his mouth still gulping down the rum and said, "Hmm! So this is the automobile chap you have been mentioning to me." "Sa..." said my two companions almost in unison with a contagious display of reverence that seemed to have at once infected me because of which I also became stiff in attention and joined Bhimsen and Ustadji in saying "Sa..." instead of the usual 'yes sir'. The CO looked at me intensely once again. It was a studious look after which he said, "Nice Bhim, well done. This chap looks exactly like the Muslim boys on the other side and can easily pass off for some Ikramuddin or Nuruddin out there. With him we won't have the kind of problem we had with that chap who looked like a bloody lala, you remember?" "Sa..." Bhimsen said dutifully.

The CO again looked at me and said "Masa Allah" and then immediately asked me if I knew the meaning of 'Masa Allah'. Before I could reply, Bhim intervened, "Sa, he knows reading and writing Urdu. His father has taught Urdu to all his brothers and sisters." The CO was not amused by Bhimsen's interjection and said, "Let him reply Bhim." Then turning towards me he said, "Yes Kishori, do you know the

meaning of 'Masha Allah'." "I do," I said and added, "sir, the correct pronunciation is 'Masha Allah' and not 'Masa Allah'. And sir," I added as if to flaunt my knowledge, "wrong pronunciation is considered very bad, almost vulgar in the Urdu language." I then went on to scribble the word in Urdu on a piece of paper lying nearby and showed it to the CO. He looked at the paper curiously without admitting that he didn't know how to read or write Urdu. In a rare gesture he shook me by the hand and patted my back saying " 'well done! Well done'!" I didn't know whether he wanted to compliment me for my knowledge of Urdu or appreciate Bhimsen for having found out some one who already knew Urdu as it could curtail the training time and operationalize me much earlier than expected.

The CO had his reasons to feel happy but I too had my own reasons to feel elated. I recalled my early childhood when my father would make my brother and me get up early during summer vacations and sit down with a wooden slate and a piece of chalk with which we would practice writing 'Alif' 'Be' 'Pe' 'te' (the Urdu alphabets) in their various calligraphic shapes. We used to often complain to our mother against this 'high handedness' when all our friends were simply enjoying the vacations but we were slogging just to learn this wretched Urdu which we thought wasn't our own language. "We are not Muslims, Majee! Why the hell should we learn Urdu," we would often complain to our mother and request her to tell father to leave us alone and forget about teaching us Urdu. One day our father called my elder brother and me and asked, "Who told you that Urdu is not our language? In fact this is the only language that belongs equally to both India and Pakistan. Look sons! My generation and all generations before me in the family knew only one language and that is Urdu. It is my mother tongue literally as my mother knew no language other than Urdu. And don't be silly my children, it has nothing to do with the Hindu-Muslim divide. My parents and my fore fathers read the Gita and Ramayana in Urdu just as our Muslim neighbors before partition read their Holy Koran in the same language." My father suddenly became emotional and said almost crying, "I don't know who played this mischief on the whole country and created this Hindu-Muslim divide. Even today my best friends are Muslims, some of whom have gone over to the other side of the border. And as far as Urdu

is concerned, whether you are BA or MA, I consider you to be an illiterate if you do not know Urdu."

As I stood facing the CO, I felt proud that because of my father I learnt Urdu and today I could correct someone as big a shot as the CO of the MI in Jallandar.

"What are you thinking Kishori?" I heard the CO addressing me. I told him what all I had been reminiscing about my father, his Muslim friends and his love for Urdu. I thought the CO will be impressed but I was wrong. The CO looked somewhat worried and concerned. "Are you sure your preliminary screening and evaluation about this chap is correct?" he asked Bhimsen. "Why sir?" said Bhim, "I think I have done the correct type of surveillance and he also fits the bill as you wanted a chap with automobile background." "Oye automobile shotomobile is alright," the CO said rather rudely, "just look at the trash filled in his mind about those bloody chaps. He is talking like a bloody Gandhi about those fellows. You know Bhim, in the MI the biggest bloody source of motivation is the bloody right kind of anger against those bloody chaps. Do you think I'll be sending him to the other side of the border for a bloody Bharatmilap with those bloody chaps." The CO was unable to hide his frustration. "Sir!" Bhimsen said politely but firmly, "I vouch for Kishori. He will be an asset for the unit. His love for the motherland is stronger than anything else and then sir his capacity to keep secrets! That too is remarkable. I know one thing. Kishori will die for the sake of the country but he will not give away the secrets even to his own people." The last sentence uttered by Bhimsen seemed to have clinched the deal. "OK Bhim. I go by your word and hope there shall be no bloody bungling. In any case we need an automobile background chap so badly that even if we have to take risk we will take it. And then there is the added advantage with this chap that he already knows Urdu because of which his training period will be shorter and we can position him immediately in the operational area so that he quickly goes across to the other side and brings us the news about the equipment. The chaps who went across earlier have come back with all sorts of cock and bull stories and I can't afford to cut a sorry figure any more before the old man," the CO finished.

There was pin drop silence in the room as the heavy wood paneling all around the

walls and the thick glass pane of the window covered with the Venetian blinds had made it completely sound proof. The CO nodded his head with a business—like "OK" which Bhimsen and Ustadji instantaneously knew was a sign that we could leave. Bhimsen looked at me and then at the CO, who immediately understood that he (Bhimsen) was interested in knowing the decision in clear terms. "Don't worry about that," the CO said waving his hand towards us both. "I will not let you down by disapproving your selection". Then looking towards ustadji he said, "Kaka start his training tomorrow and don't worry about the old man. He won't say no to this but we shall present this young man to him only after you have trained him". Bhimsen looked at me with what I could clearly see was a feeling of satisfaction and pride and then as if on second thoughts prodded me to salute 'CO saab' and thank him for my selection to the MI. "But what will be my rank," I asked rather naively. Bhimsen was visibly irritated at my audacity but the CO appeared to be more accommodating. "Bhim has already told me that he has promised to you the rank of a Captain," he said in a gentle tone that sounded like music to my ears and then added, "but the final orders for your appointment will be issued only after you complete the training successfully and the old man has interviewed you." On seeing a confused look at my face the CO went on, "Don't ask who the old man is. It's a little too early for you to know all this. You will see the old man when we take you for an interview with him after your training is complete."

As we were finally leaving, the CO called Bhimsen and told him not to blind fold me while taking me back. "I have read this boy, he is a first rate officer stuff for the MI. Let's treat him with respect," he told Bhimsen and wanted to see if I was beholden to him for the kindness. I was undecided whether to feel bad for having been blindfolded in the first place or to feel good for the latest offer of not being put to that disgrace at least now while returning. I was still undecided when Ustadji suddenly opened the door of the room abruptly bringing to an end the sound proofing. Some very familiar noises entered my ears and I suddenly felt my brain vibrating with surprise. How can those neighborhood kids come so near to this important building which is the local HQ of the MI where even I had to be brought blindfolded due to security reasons or was I mistaken about the noises. I started wondering. I stopped for a second to listen to the noise more intently

and had no doubt that I was not mistaken. Every evening some boys from the neighborhood used to play football in the backyard of our residential barrack. The entire row of the barracks had a common backyard that was separated by an old and shabby looking wire fencing from an old dilapidated bungalow adjoining it. It was a private 'old grant' bungalow that was hired for 'Army use' long time back but was left unoccupied because it was too old and ill maintained. Some times when the kids were playing, the ball would jump over the fence and roll over the thick growth of grass in the compound of the bungalow and the kids would cross the wire fencing, run inside the bungalow to bring the ball back. It is on such occasions that the children would be making noises shouting at each other to stop the ball and not let it roll any further. I remember having asked my father a number of times why the bungalow was kept vacant if government had hired it and was paying rent. My brother used to often ask my father why the bungalow could not be allotted to us instead of the barrack if we gave willingness to live even if it was dilapidated. We used to often wonder that my father who worked for the MES and was otherwise aware of so many inside things didn't have any clue about the status of this bungalow. Perhaps to overcome his embarrassment for not being privy even to such simple information in spite of being an MES insider, he would tell us that even the BSO doesn't know the actual status of the bungalow. I stopped once again and heard the children's noise and was sure that it was the same familiar noise which I had heard day in and day out. During summer season the children would often play till late in the evening well past 9 or some times even 10 at night. If the noise is what I think it was then I must be in the same bungalow which was just behind our house adjoining our backyard. Yes of course it was the same bungalow and eventhough it was believed to be generally unoccupied sometimes we were told that some 'fauzis' do come to live here temporarily if they have to wait for some short time for regular allotment.

I don't know why but I suddenly felt angry at Bhimsen and once again started thinking whether he was a criminal who wanted to keep everything secret. "What is this Bhimsen," I said accusing him with a straight pointed finger almost touching his chest. "Why did you have to blindfold me to bring me to this house which is next to our common backyard? Just tell me what is your game and who are these people whom you are calling officers of the MI. Don't take me for granted

Bhimsen. I respect you only because you are a friend of my elder brother but if I get to know that you are into criminal activities let me tell you I will first break your bones and then hand you over to the police along with all your accomplices whom you are calling Army officers belonging to the MI." Bhimsen appeared completely crest fallen and before I could give him a hard punch straight in the face, he looked almost pathetically deep inside my eyes. "How could you think Kishori that I am a criminal," he said almost crying. "I am a patriot to the core of my heart. I can die for mother India and if I am in the MI it is only because of my love for the country. Kishori, one has to compromise so many things so many times in the service of 'Bharat Mata.' I have put up with insults for the sake of my duty. The insult shown by you just a moment ago has also been tolerated by me only because of my sense of duty otherwise I could have shot any one calling me a criminal." Bhimsen took out a pistol from under his shirt. He touched it to my forehead and thundered, "if I am not shooting you in spite of your utterances it is only because I don't want the MI to loose a chap like you for the MI. We need an automobile chap to cross over urgently and bring some reports. Otherwise I would have shot you and killed you by now. My name is Bhimsen and I am a true son of mother India ready to die for the sake of the country. You have the cheek to call me a criminal." Bhimsen said gnashing his teeth and gesticulating violently at me. He first thundered and then started crying hysterically. I didn't know how to tackle this completely unexpected turn of events. "Bhim praji," I entreated him, "please forgive me as you would your own younger brother, but please tell me if it isn't the same house and if it is then please also tell me why did you have to blindfold me." Bhimsen had by now calmed down. "Yes Kishori, it is the same house and you had to be brought here blindfolded because Ustadji didn't agree to any relaxation in the common practice about first timers. After all, unlike me or you he is a regular fauzi." I wanted to ask Bhimsen if he wasn't or if I won't be a regular fauzi but avoided because I thought Bhimsen had already had enough of me for the day. I thought I shall ask him some other time.

Ustadji remained with the CO *saab*. As I was coming out Bhimsen told me to be ready by about sevenish the next day and meet him at Ustadji's living quarters from where I was to be taken to the place where my training was to be conducted.

4

Induction and The 'Old Man'

If I say I could not sleep that night it would be gross understatement. The night was simply turbulent. All through I remained nervous, eager and worried and therefore, wide awake. My mind became overcrowded with thoughts and imagination ranging from euphoria to depression and I felt irritated because I didn't know which of the two was real and worth believing—euphoria or depression. Everything that had happened from the moment Bhimsen shared the secret of his job with me to the offer he made to me for joining the MI kept coming alive again and again in my mind leaving me progressively unsure of myself each time. I kept on asking myself if the decision I was about to take or had perhaps already taken was right. Is Bhimsen actually fired with the noble sentiment of service to mother India or he is simply an imposter luring young unpolluted minds into some kind of a nefarious gang in the name of patriotism? Why was I blind folded while being taken to the CO *saab*? Why didn't he tell me that the building I was being taken to was actually the deserted old bungalow next to our backyard? Who is the mysterious 'old man' without whose consent they don't want to issue my appointment letter for the MI even though they are otherwise saying that my selection is final? Could it be that they are fooling me in the name of the MI whereas they aren't even remotely concerned with the MI, Army or for that matter with any department of the Government? The way the CO *saab* reacted to my query about my rank in the Army also created suspicion in my mind. The CO had stated that Bhimsen had informed him that he has already promised the rank of a Captain to me. "How can I refuse to honour Bhimsen's word," (Bhimsen di gal main qiveyn morh sakda haan?) he had said. After all it is recruitment to a well-organized department like the Army where everything has to be as per set norms. How could an important issue like the rank to be conferred on a new entrant be decided by the personal regards one officer has for his acquaintance?

The flood of questions in my mind had not yet stopped when I noticed the crack of dawn. My mother used to say that the time of dawn is divinely gifted because of which it fills every heart and every mind with a feeling of joy. I thought she was right as the first flush of the soothing light of a new dawn filled my heart with an inexplicable feeling of joy. As darkness of the night gave way to light I felt the dark thoughts in my mind had also slowly but surely started dissipating. The indecision was over, despondency withered and confusion completely cleared. I suddenly remembered another quotable quote of my mother. "Some people simply do not know how to be happy. Even if God gives them the best of things they will still manage to find something lacking and start brooding unmindful of the bounty that God has already bestowed upon them," she would often say and feel sorry for 'ehoje rondu lokki' (such utterly miserable people). I will not be 'ehoja rondu', I had decided once and for all. After all I wanted to be in a job where I could at once be an Army officer as well as an automobile engineer. It was a rare combination I knew very well and yet God had granted my wish and given me the kind of job I had been praying for. Why should I still have negative ideas in my mind instead of thanking God and celebrating for this unique selection. I instantly decided to go over to the next room and seek the blessings of my parents for a successful career in the Army. My father shall be thrilled and say, "Oye tu Captain ban gaya hai; oye mainu nahi si pata tu enna hoshyar munda hai." Then perhaps on the lighter side my father will stand in 'Attention' and salute me saying 'Good morning Captain *saab*'. My mother I knew was not very vocal about her feelings. Though she will be happy, but instead of bursting into joy she will simply kiss me on the forehead and ask if because of the new job I shall have to be away from the family. She would then advice me take care of myself (apna khan peen da dhyan rakhin kaka).

I suddenly realized that I was getting lost into a dream world. How can I break the news of my appointment to my parents, I realized, as I have to keep it secret because of the nature of my job. It was painful. A joy that you cannot share with your own people loses bulk of its thrill. As if that was not enough I had to spin a story about why and where I was going so early in the morning. I knew it would be difficult to convince my mother as to what exactly was the purpose of my outing

so early in the morning especially because I had shaved, taken a bath and put on the best of my trousers and shirt. I nevertheless had to tell my parents that I was going out for 'some work'. The promise of secrecy that I had made to Bhimsen was only limited to my not telling my parents that I had taken up a job in the MI or the nature of the job.

When I walked into my parents' room I had still not decided on the alibi for being all dressed up and going out so early. I found my mother was already awake and engaged in her daily round of early morning prayers. My father too was awake but still lying in bed. "Oye tainu ki hogaya ajj svere svere," my mother almost yelled at me. "Kitthe jaan nu enna tyar hoke ayaa hai, naha dho ke chitte kapde paa ke?" (What has happened to you today? Where are you going so early in the morning with so much of grooming; having taken bath and put on these sparkling white, well ironed clothes). I am going to meet some one maaji," I replied pretending to be as normal as I could. "I can see that you are going to meet some one, you don't have to tell me some thing that I am seeing, but who exactly are you going to meet and where are you going to meet whosoever you are going to meet? That is what I want to know and that is what you should have told me in the first place on your own without beating round the bush," my mother shot back. "Maaji, I told you I am going to meet some one. I can also tell you that I am going to meet some one important. And please Maaji excuse me as I cannot tell you anything more than that." I replied laboring to avoid eye contact with my mother. My mother got up, walked straight next to me and asked me sternly to look into her eyes and then say again what I had told her a moment back. I kept my head bowed down because I knew that it was impossible for any one to look straight into my mother's eyes and tell a lie. (Subsequently while in Pakistani jail, when I withstood the worst forms of torture from the toughest Pakistani interrogators without any give away, I used to often wonder that my mother's expertise in getting the truth out of any one without inflicting any torture at all was simply unsurpassable.).When my mother saw that I was refusing to look her in the eyes she willingly gave up as a proof of her limitless affection towards me. "I know puttar (son) that you will not hide something from me unless you have some really compelling reasons for doing so. You want to be excused? OK , I excuse you. But remember one

thing, don't do any thing which might bring disgrace to you or your family." As my mother finished the sentence I could clearly see a strange mix of feelings in her eyes. They showed fear, trust and despondency at once. "I promise maaji... neither am I going to meet some wrong person for wrong reasons nor shall I do that ever in my life. Trust your son, but please do forgive me for not being able to disclose anything to you at the moment as I am really helpless." I said while walking out of the room.

As I was walking out I heard my mother telling my father in a hushed voice, "You know this boy has fallen for some girl and is going to meet her. Otherwise he would not have hidden anything from me."(Lagda hai kaka merai layi nuh labban ja raya hai. Nahi ta merae kolun ae kuchh nahi chhipaunda). I had heard every word but didn't stop for any clarification because I was getting late and also perhaps because I didn't want her to come out of this sweet suspense at least for some time. It also at once occurred to me that if my mother remains under this impression I will not have to do any explaining for my similar escapades in future which I knew would be more often than she could perhaps expect.

Bhimsen had told me to reach Ustadji's place at 'sevenish' but I was already there when it was a little more than 6.30 or so in the morning. (After I had spent some time in the company of ustadji and others in the MI, I learnt that sevenish means a little later than seven o'clock). Ustadji was still busy doing the workouts that he told me was part of his daily routine. "Because I am from the FS&I (Field Security & Intelligence) it is not compulsory for me to join the others in the morning PT," Ustadji volunteered the information as a gesture of his trust in me. "You know Kishori some times we also have to keep tabs on some black sheep within the uniformed elements and if our face is known to the bloody jokers then it becomes difficult," he added by way of elaboration in a typical 'fauzi' style. Ustadji then suddenly saw the time and said loudly, "Oye why did you come so early? You were told to come around seven and it is not even 6.45 and you are already there". He suddenly lowered the volume of his speech and said, "You know kishori *kaka*, this is the irony. When people newly join a service they are so fond of the office that they reach early and leave late, but after a few days the fondness vanishes and the fellows are always on the look out for some excuse or

the other to avoid work." I thought Ustadji was getting philosophical, but Ustadji was quick to effortlessly dispel my feeling. "Have you got married?" he asked me and when I replied in the negative he continued boisterously, "this is precisely what happens in marriage also *kaka*. For some time after marriage, the bloody man and woman simply remain stuck into each other but after some time you simply want to avoid it" Ustadji made some gestures with his hands which I found to be obscene while emphasizing 'it' and burst into a bawdy joke so popular amongst the rank and file of army men the world over.

Ustadji was still narrating the joke when Bhimsen walked in. Ustadji wanted Bhimsen to join in by contributing some explicit similies but Bhimsen felt a little awkward perhaps because he was my elder brother's friend and didn't want to forfeit the respect he got from me on par with my elder brother. "I am taking Kishori to the training center Ustadji and shall wait for you there for taking him for the medical", Bhimsen said completely ignoring Ustadji and his joke. Without waiting for Ustadji's response he walked upto his bike parked just outside, signaled me to ride on the pillion and as usual zoomed away. I found him riding aimlessly all over the town for nearly half an hour after which he stopped in front of a simple looking barrack that appeared to be in need of a coat of whitewash for ages. The barrack was deep inside what appeared to be a 'unit line' from where the nearest thoroughfare was not less than a mile away. The small nondescript structure stood out alone in stark contrast to the vast stretches of vacant land looking like what is commonly known as 'training areas' in a Cantonment. What differentiated the location from other training areas however was complete absence of any trainees for as far as one could see. There was no human face or activity anywhere within seeing distance. As Bhimsen was parking his bike a lone figure appeared from the backside of the barrack and greeted Bhimsen with a horribly badly pronounced 'salam wale qum'. Bhimsen replied with an equally bad accent saying 'wale qum salam Cheemaji'. My fetish for proper pronounciation of Urdu and Arabic words instantly came all over my face but before I could make my displeasure known, Bhimsen made the atmosphere light by introducing me to 'Cheemaji' as his prospective 'rangrut' (army slang for a trainee). Before Cheemaji could react, Bhimsen hastened to add how well versed I was with the Urdu language because of

which instead of being taught I could end up teaching the 'ustad loki' (trainers).

We were not asked to come inside as no one was supposed to enter the office in the absence of 'Ustadji.' It was a sensitive office after all. Bhimsen was still talking to Cheemaji about me when Ustadji arrived. He shouted at Cheemaji for keeping us waiting outside. "Oye don't you know Bhimsen?" Ustadji said admonishingly. "Why did you not let him get inside?" and then added as if on second thoughts, "and you better see this *kaka* and know him well. He is a learned man… what you call hmmm, yes I remember what you call… 'Aleem'." I spontaneously felt like correcting the pronunciation but kept myself in check for fear of being misunderstood as an arrogant young man. We went inside, soon after which Ustadji got into business. He took out a wad of papers, selected some and passed them on to Bhimsen asking him to obtain my signatures on them. Bhimsen mechanically shoved the papers into my hands, took out a pen from his pocket, opened it, placed its cover on to the rear end and passed the pen on to me asking me to sign the papers. "But what are these papers? let me at least have a cursory glance of them," I said, trying to go through as quickly as I could manage. Bhimsen and Ustadji reacted together showing their irritation and asked me to change my habit of questioning everything and not having faith in any one; not even in his elder brother's friend and Ustadji, who was soon going to be my 'Guru' (mentor). After Bhimsen had finished his sermon on the virtue of trust and vice of lack of faith in one's elders and 'gurus' it was Ustadji's turn to intervene. "Oye look here," he said "these are just some formalities insisted upon by the bloody babus in Delhi. Those bloody chaps sitting in South block and the hutments around it do not know that the MI runs, not on their bloody papers but on trust and faith which the operatives have in us. *Kaka* sign these and I shall explain their contents to you." I started signing the papers, not because of any instantly developed faith in Ustadji but because of a strong feeling of total surrender to my destiny and helplessness. Well it is I who had committed myself to this unenviable position of no return because of my ambition of becoming an officer in the Army and foolishly playing into hands of some people whom I knew but not well enough to be convinced of their activities or motives. What can I do now except for doing what these fellows ask me to do, I said to myself. The feeling of helplessness was so overpowering that I

couldn't care to listen and understand what Ustadji had started explaining about the papers I was signing. I could vaguely make out that according to Ustadji the papers contained my consent to work for the MI and affirmation to the effect that I was aware that the job involved crossing over the border which could be risky, but I was taking the risk voluntarily with full knowledge of its consequences. (I subsequently learnt that what Ustadji told me was not the complete truth, as at least one of the papers signed by me was supposed to be my willingness for a surgical procedure to be performed on me for circumcision).

After I had signed the papers I was told to accompany Ustadji and Bhimsen to the MH (Military Hospital) for a medical check up to assess my fitness for a job in the military. This time there was an Army jeep waiting to take us. In the MH I was taken straight to the Commandant's room. I found the CO *saab* already there, chatting with the Commandant. The Commandant didn't talk to me at all but asked a couple of his subordinates to conduct the 'medical'. They were NCOs and at least one JCO from the AMC. The JCO recorded my height and weight and asked me if I or any one in my family had any chronic disease. After these basic formalities I was told to proceed to the surgeon's room as the next part of 'medical' was to be carried out by the surgeon. The JCO who accompanied me showed some papers to the surgeon, who without wasting any time asked me to follow him into the ante room. (The ante room turned out to be a mini operation theatre, OT). Once in the ante room (read OT) the surgeon told me to take off my trousers and underwear and put on a 'lungi' given by one of the attendants. I was told to lie on the table for the 'test'. As I could see that I was in an OT and the table on which I was asked to lie down was actually an operation table, I started wondering what kind of medical fitness test could it be. Then I once again remembered my mother's admonition for those who always see something or the other negative in the best of situations and decided not to harbour any suspicion any more. "After all," I told myself "a moment back I was doubting whether these people have anything at all to do with the Army and are imposters." "Now that I am in the MH and have also seen the CO *saab* chatting with the Commandant of the MH as an officer of equal rank, I should be happy that I was dealing with genuine people and my selection in the Army was real and not a sham. My mother was

right that some people manage to feel unhappy even in the best of situations. Let me not be one of those miserable people," I told myself. My dream session was broken by a sudden prick of injection on my genital. As my body shook because of the sudden prick the surgeon told me to relax, as it was nothing but a very simple injection for some test for VD. My face was covered with a green sheet of towel and for the next five or ten minutes I could not feel any thing except the surgeon's hands occasionally touching my body in the vicinity of my genitals and an occasional sound produced apparently by some metal objects (surgical instruments) being taken from a tray and dropped back.

When the towel was removed from my face and I was asked to getup I saw some cotton dabs soaked in fresh blood lying in a tray on a stool by the side of the table. The surgeon had already left and the NCO (a male nurse) who could perhaps guess my disturbed state of mind on seeing the blood soaked dabs tried to reassure me by saying not to worry as what has been done is nothing but a very small simple operation. "Be brave and don't worry," he said patronizingly. "In the Army I have seen people's hands and feet being amputated. At least once during the war when I was in a field hospital somewhere in the North-East, I helped the surgeon carry out an amputation even without anesthesia." The NCO had started boasting unmindful of the trauma I was going through and then suddenly realizing that I needed some reassuring words more than the tales of his bravado, started consoling me. "You don't have to feel upset about it at all. It doesn't have any bad effect on your masculinity," he said. "It is just peeling off some extra skin which would have been done ceremoniously had you been born a Muslim or perhaps even a Jew." It was now my turn to feel foxed. "What are you talking about?" I said, struggling to raise the pitch of my voice as high as I could and overcome the weakness I was feeling because of what I now knew for sure to have been a surgery performed on me. "Have I been operated upon?" "Yes of course, a small surgery has been done on you for circumcision; but why are you behaving like a mad man?" the JCO wondered aloud.

"I am behaving like a mad man because I have reason to go mad," I yelled hysterically. "How can you perform an operation on some one without his consent? Do you know it is a crime?" The NCO rushed out of the OT and soon

returned accompanied by the surgeon who asked in a menacingly curt manner, "What's your problem? Why are you creating a scene?" I repeated my objection to surgery having been performed on me on the pretext of conducting tests to assess my fitness for joining the Army. "Who told you that what I was doing was a fitness test and not a surgery?" the surgeon asked . "I was told that I was being brought to the MH for a fitness test," I said and added "and you told me that this is precisely what you were going to do when you asked me to lie down on the table," I replied, matching the sternness of the surgeon. The surgeon had another question. "And why do you say as say that the surgery has been performed without your consent?" "Simple," I retorted, "I say so because I have never given my consent for any surgery." The surgeon looked at the NCO who was already shuffling through a bunch of papers he held in his hand. After a few seconds the NCO took out one paper and handed it over to the surgeon. "Now read it," the surgeon said while passing the paper on to me. Yes, it was a paper that bore my signatures somewhere in the middle. Just above my signatures a few lines were typed. It said that I was willingly giving my consent for a surgery to get myself circumcised at the MH. I took no time to understand that it was one of the many papers I was told to sign by Ustadji as 'mere formality'.

I once again decided to resign to my fate as there was nothing else I could do under the circumstances. The surgeon had meanwhile gone perhaps to report the matter to the Commandant. Soon after, Ustadji entered the room and told me not to be fussy about every small thing. Once you join Army and that too the MI, there are so many things and so many occasions on which you have to accept what your seniors decide for you. "How can you call it a small thing Ustadji," I pleaded with the ever jovial army man. "I have been mutilated without my consent. Is it a small thing?" Perhaps sensing that I was still not reconciled to what had been done to me Ustadji appeared a bit softened and told me to come along with him to the office where he said we could discuss everything freely.

Once in the office I found Ustadji in no mood to talk. He quickly opened one of the many cupboards in the room and took out, strangely, a roll of white bandage. "Now take off your shoes and hold forth your left foot," he said in a matter of fact manner and without waiting for me to respond pulled my left foot. He put thick

layers of cotton round my foot and ankle and then started tying the bandage all over, covering the sole of my foot and thence going up to the ankle. He took out a packet of medicines – antibiotics, pain killers and vitamin B complex – and told me to go home and take the medicines for three days - as per direction written on a paper given to him by the surgeon. Yes it was a proper prescription written by the surgeon showing the disease as 'foot injury'. Ustadji told me not to talk about the surgery to any one even in my family. "Just go home and take these medicines for three days after which the surgeon will examine you and if you are fit, your training will start from that very day. If anyone at home asks, you tell them you fell from the bike and injured your foot."

I once again felt guilty for having been secretive with my own parents but had by now understood very clearly that I was helpless and had to accept things as they come. To see for myself whether in this entire bargain there is anything that could lessen my feeling of having been cheated, I asked Ustadji with a pitiable face, "I have no option but to act as per your wishes. But Ustadji, please for God's sake tell me honestly whether at the end of it all I shall get the promised job in the Army?" Ustadji was visibly pleased as he could feel that he had emerged as the victor and told me patronizingly, "look *kaka*, at our level we have already promised that to you but to be honest, the final decision rests with the old man and until he interviews and approves you I cannot say anything with finality." "And who is this mysterious entity called the old man?" I asked. "You will know the old man when he calls you for the interview, but till then you have to wait. I can't tell you anything about the old man except that he is a hard task master, a no nonsense man and a Brigadier in the Indian Army." Before Ustadji finished he reminded me again about the need for total secrecy about my affairs with the MI and told me to be ready to be picked up from Bhimsen's house exactly after three days to first go to the MH and then, depending upon the surgeon's advice, starting my training for the MI. "Oye, what you people call in that bloody Urdu, Insa allah," Ustadji finished. I had neither the will nor the strength to tell him that the correct pronunciation is 'Insha Allah' and not 'insa allah' and that its meaning is 'God Willing'. The jeep dropped me in front of Bhimsen's house from where I walked down to ours. No one was at home except my mother who was too busy in the kitchen to notice my arrival. I went straight into the room I shared with my brother and hit the bed as I was too tired, partly because of the surgery but largely because of the mess in which I thought I had put myself.

5

My Mother Joins Me In The Prayers

The next three days felt like three centuries to me. Because of the depressing feeling of having been subjected to mutilation through sheer deception, the effect of what the surgeon and the NCO in the MH called 'very simple surgery' far exceeded the physical pain that I could bear even without any pain killers in the normal course. Adding burden to my already heavy heart was the caveat that I should not disclose anything whatsoever to any one including my parents or any other member of my family. The physical mutilation of my body was proving to be particularly traumatic in the absence of someone with whom I could share my feeling of complete letdown by those whom I considered to be role models for any patriotic Indian. I felt as if I had been forcibly converted to another faith altogether and was being held hostage by the very perpetrators of this atrocity. Long time back I had seen a Hindi movie in which the hero held captive by the villain's henchmen was forced to speak to his parents on phone and say that he was being treated extremely nicely by his captors even as one of the captors would be shown holding, nay pressing a pistol to his forehead. I felt my predicament was worse than the hero of such films as I had to pretend that nothing was wrong with me even when my tormentors weren't around. TVs were not very common those days and remote control was a term unheard of and unknown, but now in retrospect I feel that my anguish had multiplied manifold as I was being remote controlled by my tormentors.

My mother was a genius of sorts. She could intuitively guess if any one in the family – we, her children or our father – was facing a problem or even passing through some kind of disturbance in the mind. She could almost accurately guess the nature and the reasons of the disturbance and could suggest remedies with full confidence in their efficacy with a convincing show of authority. When she finished

her daily chores in the kitchen and saw me lying on the bed she knew instantly that all was not well with her son. She also guessed that the agony I was going through was unprecedented and thus very serious. Normally she would lose her temper and fly into a visible rage if someone she wanted to console tried to hide anything from her, but she had mastered the technique of not just holding back her anger but effortlessly converting it into a spectacular show of tenderness if she guessed that the level of the problem for the other side was unusually high. Perhaps she had already guessed the unbearable trauma I, her dear son, was passing through. She put her palms on my forehead in a soothing caress and asked most tenderly, "puttar ki hoya hai tainu? Mainu kyon nahin dasda, mai ta teri maa han puttar teri ai halat waikh ke mera dil ron lag painda hai." (What has happened to you my son? Why don't you tell me? After all I am your mother and my heart cries when I see unhappiness on your face).

I made vain efforts to wear normalcy on my face and told her that I had fallen from Bhim's bike and hurt my left foot, which is painful. "I can see the bandage on your left foot," she was quick to retort. "But why don't you tell me the real problem? I know it is not your left foot. And if you insist that there is nothing else I shall take off this shabbily put bandage from your foot and prove that it is something else or at least something more." Then she suddenly changed the tone of her voice making it more sweet and tender. "Look son, seeing the painful look on your face I feel completely broken from within. I don't want to make it an occasion to show my smartness by pulling off the bandage and proving you wrong. Please have confidence in me and tell me what exactly has happened." "In fact," she added, "you should tell me frankly what exactly has been happening to you for the last couple of weeks. Ever since we went to Nandachur (our native village) and you decided to stay back, I have always seen tension on your face. Why don't you tell me what exactly is bothering you. I will certainly try and find some solution to your problem. A mother never fails in helping her children. That is God's special grace on her. But the children have to be at least frank and not secretive," she finished with helplessness writ large on her face. Then, as if bouncing back suddenly she said, "I think the fountainhead of your problems is Bhimsen. I must go and pull him up for having made this rose of mine unhappy. I know it is he, in fact I knew

it the day you got up early and went over to his place, refusing to disclose to me where you were going and why you were going wherever you were going. You know, Kishori it is only to save your father from tension that I pretended like an indolent mother and told him that you were going to meet a girl who could soon be my daughter-in-law. In fact I knew that you were going to Bhimsen's place. It worried me Kishori, because there are a few things which I know about Bhim but not many others including your father know." My mother finished suddenly.

I felt alarmed at my mother saying that she knew certain things about Bhimsen that few others did. The first thought that crossed my mind was that Bhimsen could be into some kind of undesirable, criminal activities as guessed by me couple of times during my brief interaction with him, which my mother could be aware of with certainty. Why I thought on these lines was because I was more than certain that in so far as Bhimsen's (or for that matter any one else's) association with the MI was concerned, I thought it was impossible for a simple housewife like my mother to be privy to such an important state secret. Bhimsen had flaunted repeatedly before me that even the senior most serving officers of the Army outside the MI aren't supposed to know who an MI operative is or what the operative is supposed to be doing during the course of his duty. (I subsequently realized that these are the stories fed by people like Ustadji to new recruits to make them feel important to the point of euphoria. Such legends help keep the recruits in a state of delirious self-deception because of which they are kept in the flock). It was because of such an exaggerated feeling of importance of association with the MI that I took it for granted that my mother wouldn't know of this top secret and asked her if she was aware of any criminal activities of Bhimsen, of which others knew nothing. She replied in the negative but asserted once again that there are a few things that she knew but others didn't. She knew these things because God had given her a head that thinks. Our conversation ended but not before my mother had once again repeated the caveat that if I concealed anything from her it could well nigh be at my own peril.

On the third day I got up unusually early in the morning, took a bath, got ready and went straight to my mother's 'puja room'. (In those days, in all decent households there used to be one room or if the family was too poor to spare a room, at least

a corner in some room which used to be meant exclusively for religious worship. It was called the 'puja ghar'. Depending upon what religion or religious sect you follow, the 'puja ghar' used to have a couple of photographs of the gods, the Gurus and some places of pilgrimage. There would invariably be a small lamp that would be lit up with a cotton wick and clarified butter every morning and evening when all members of the family would assemble and say their prayers. Some incense sticks would also be burnt which would keep the house full of fragrance all the time. The task of lighting up the lamp and leading the prayer could be done either by the male head of the family or the lady of the house. In times of any crisis or any problem being faced by the family, the prayer session that would normally last for just about 10 – 15 minutes could be extended suitably and it would be the most effective source of confidence and solace for the whole family. In our house one room was meant exclusively for this purpose. We had photographs of Hanuman, Shankar, and Devi Durga (all Gods of the Hindu pantheon), photographs of Guru Nanak (the Sikh Guru) and one photograph each of Haridwar, the Golden temple and the Dargah of the famous sufi saint, Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer (places of pilgrimage according to Hindu and Sikh religion and Sufism respectively). The prayers led by my mother in which the whole family joined twice daily were also from all the three religions—Hinduism, Sikhism and Sufism. Such was the respect for all religions followed by the people of the subcontinent in the minds of a common man in the Indian subcontinent in those days. It is a pity that nowadays the system of having a 'puja ghar' in the house has vanished. The few households that have it do not keep it functional for the daily prayer assemblies of the family and maintain it only as a showpiece with costly wooden structures of temples, artificial fancy lights and divine images made of precious metals and semi-precious stones. The 'puja ghar' as a symbol of faith and respect for all major religions of the subcontinent has completely vanished.)

I went over to the 'puja ghar', lit the lamp and the incense sticks and started praying to God with all my heart in a state of meditation. Since the previous night I was feeling nervous and scared about my future. The confidence I had reposed earlier in Bhimsen and the rest of the MI guys because of my romance with patriotism had started shaking after I was subjected to the mutilation of my

body through sheer deception. Ever since, I had been brooding most of the time and had been feeling extremely nervous and insecure. But the moment I started my silent prayers and meditation, the nervousness simply vanished and I could ful the strength to face whatever God wanted me to face. My prayers included the recitation of the 'Hanuman Chalisa' (a Hindu prayer to overcome fear) and some verses from the Japuji Sahab (from the Sikh scripture). After the recitations I mustered all the force of my heart and mind, focused my entire consciousness on the Supreme Divine (not any individual God of any particular religion) and said to God, "You know God that I have never wronged any one. Nor have I ever acted immorally. If I felt attracted to Bhimsen's offer for a career in the MI it is primarily out of my ambition to serve the motherland. If my heart is pure and my mind clean, then it is Your responsibility to save me from disgrace and crises. Today I am starting a new chapter in my life and entering a world about which I do not know any thing at all. I do not fear physical pain and if You decide that I should pass through some I shall accept that as Your desire and face that happily; but please save me from any disgrace as that is something even You would not like me to face because of my pure heart and clean mind. Now God I submit myself entirely to Your will, please take me in your protection." My prayer was inspired partly by what my mother had taught me about the philosophy of complete surrender to God as per the Bhagwad Geeta and partly by the teachings of Guru Nanak.

As I was preparing to leave the 'puja ghar', I saw my mother standing right behind me. It seems she had come much earlier and joined the prayers but I couldn't notice her because I was in deep meditation. My mother put her hand on my head as her blessing for protecting me from any troubles, looked straight into my eyes and said, "don't feel nervous or scared Kishori, God will protect you from all the troubles because you are innocent and He is kind." What she said next was enough to leave me completely stunned. "I know *puttar* that Bhimsen has led you to the MI," she said, and added, "I wish you had confided atleast in me when there was still time for you to reconsider and pull back. I feel worried for you because I know some cases where these people have disowned and deserted their men in times of crisis. They are with you as long as you don't need them, but they simply desert you if and when you need their help. I also know that they don't pay you your

rightful dues because most of the money the Government gives them they bungle and fill their own coffers rather than spend for the purpose for which the money has been given to them." "But Maaji, how do you know these things," I asked. "MI is the most secret organization about which even the sub-area commander doesn't know much." "Yes, it is a secret organization about which people don't know much," my mother replied and added, "but there are some families around whose members were recruited by the MI and subsequently abandoned. Some of these people and their families are spilling the beans all the time. Even your father knows about many such cases. Their strength is not that their activities are secret. Their real strength lies in luring youngsters like you into their fold and brainwashing them into keeping their association with the MI a secret even from their parents. As long as you are with them you keep their secrets and think that no one except you knows anything about them. You are thereby deluded into feeling important and not disclosing your association with them to anyone. But if you were to speak to someone perhaps you will come across someone who might tell you of their dismal record in looking the other way if their people fall into any problem and need their help." "In that case Maaji, should I go and tell them that I am not interested and am pulling out?" I asked my mother. "No," she said firmly, "it is not as simple as that *puttar*. I have heard that they can go to any extent – even physically eliminate – if a person having once got in decides to pull back. Listen Kishori, I am not saying these people are murderous as the top brass is all honorable people from the officer class of the Army, but I have heard all kinds of stories from some families living in the nearby villages whose members have had a brush with the MI. My only regret is that you didn't take me into confidence in the beginning when options could be available. Now that you have reached the point of starting your training with them I don't think you should even imagine to quit. If the stories I have heard from some of the families living in nearby villages including our own village Nandachur could be even partly true, I would advise you to submit yourself to the will of God rather than think of pulling out. Kishori, I am not telling anything to your father because he may get worried about you." As my mother was about to finish, her feeble voice suddenly became stern and assertive. "Remember one thing Kishori," she commanded, "whatever the MI fellows do, you

should not do anything that could be termed treachery against the motherland. The other side may try to wean you away from your duty towards mother India by intimidation or temptation but you should not succumb. If they torture you, prefer death to betrayal. If they offer you monetary temptations, tactfully wriggle out of it and report to your superior at the earliest. I have heard that sometimes the other side tries to win over young boys like you through beautiful girls, I have confidence in you that you will not bring disgrace to the family by falling into such traps. Remember Kishori, if I hear the news of your death in the call of your duty, I shall be sad but I might survive the trauma. But if your father or I come to know of any betrayal by you we shall simply die of the shock. Now that you are already at a point of no return, trust in God and go ahead."

6

My Training Starts

The prayer session in the 'puja ghar' pulled me out of the state of helplessness and confusion I had been passing through since my scheduled visit to the MH and unscheduled surgery performed there. My mother's impromptu sermon and her powerful words of blessings added significantly to my strength. As a result when I left for Bhimsen's house to be picked up by the MI jeep for starting my training, the nervousness had simply vanished and I was brimming with confidence.

I didn't have to wait much at Bhimsen's house, as Ustadji was already there when I reached. His typical happy go lucky self, Ustadji gave me a tight hug only Punjabis are capable of and asked rather boisterously, "Oye kaka, ki hal hai tera? Tu ta enni urdu janda hai ki pailaon ton hi tu mulla siga! Je asi tainu thodakjaya vad ditta te ki kufar kitta. Shukar kar sada asi tainu hun pura mullah bana ditta hai". (How are you young lad? You already know so much of Urdu that you are already like a muslim. If we arranged for that small cut on you why should you be angry with us? We have only done what was needed to make you a complete Muslim?) Ustadji suddenly mellowed down and asked if I was feeling better with the medicines he had given me or were there any complications post surgery. I gave a long hard stare to the burly sardar as if to show to him my newly acquired confidence first hand and said in a carefree manner matching his own disposition, "Tussi fikar na karo Ustadji. Sab kuchh fit hai. Je koi problem hoi te twhanu hi dassangai hor ki saale pakistaniyan nu dassangai." (Don't you worry Sardarji, everything is fine, and if there is any problem I shall tell it to, who else but you. You can't expect me to talk about my problems to those bloody Pakistanis). Ustadji was visibly happy to see the sea change in not just my disposition but also the mannerism and said, "Ai shabash hai! Lag da munda hun jawan ho gaya hai." (How nice! Seems like this boy has now become a man). Then, as if suddenly

realizing that as a Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) of the Indian Army he should not play the jester all the time and should put on a serious face at least occasionally, he started sounding official, saying we need not waste any more time and head straight to the MH as the surgeon might be waiting. In the bargain he also blurted out what in all fairness should have remained a secret. Ustadji disclosed that whenever a MI surgery case is expected, the surgeon has to keep himself totally free from other patients as leakage of an activity of this kind in the MH might embarrass the Army Doctors before the medical community outside and questions of medical ethics could also be raised.

Ustadji and I got into the jeep and headed for the MH. Bhimsen left on his bike direct to the office. As we were leaving I was wondering whether it wasn't ironical that a person like Ustadji who – howsoever nice and jolly he might be – had such poor sense of what to make public and what to be preserved as a secret, was soon going to be my trainer instead of my trainee. I was still mulling about this and many other ironies I had noticed in the last couple of weeks when I realized that we had already reached the MH. The surgeon was alone as had been forecast by Ustadji and waiting exclusively for me that made me feel important as I knew that Army Doctors especially the Surgeons could not be kept waiting even by Brigadiers and Generals. What followed was almost robotic and enough to wither away my recently assumed feeling of importance. Without opening his mouth the surgeon signaled at me to lie down on the stretcher, turned into an examination table. Soon after, a nursing orderly came, pulled a wooden partition along the length of the stretcher for the sake of camouflage and asked me to take off my pants. He examined the place where the surgery had been performed, pressed it a couple of times and asked me if it pained. When I said no, the nursing orderly declared that I was alright. Pants put on again I walked towards the surgeon who was busy passing on some papers to the CO *saab* who had been already sitting when we reached there. As he was passing on the papers to the CO, the surgeon opened his mouth for the first time since I had arrived in his chamber. "Here is your new Mian sahib, Col Bhatti. Call him Nuruddin or Ikramuddin or whatever else you please. My job is over," he said in a manner that was as arrogant as it was insensitive. CO *saab* in turn ordered Ustadji to take me to the office and

start my training.

When we reached office, Bhimsen was already there. In addition there were another 8 – 10 people. As I was preparing to go round and introduce myself to the rest, Bhimsen held me back and advised in whispers that in the MI I should not volunteer my introduction to any one. You introduce yourself only if you are asked to do so. Likewise you are not supposed to ask anyone else for his introduction. If anyone is required to introduce himself to you he will come to you and do so but on your own don't ask any one for his introduction. Bhimsen then added somewhat apologetically that this was the system not just in the MI, but also in any other intelligence setup anywhere in the world. Soon after Ustadji took charge and sent everybody except three persons including myself to go over to the adjacent room escorted by a NCO (non-commissioned officer, a euphemism for an Army Jawan so ingeniously introduced by the British colonial masters and retained by the top brass of the Indian army even after independence). Everyone left as ordered by Ustadji. Only five persons remained in the room; Ustadji, Bhimsen, two other persons whom I didn't know and I. Ustadji introduced the two strangers as Veda and Cheema and introduced me to them as Ikramuddin. I was told that Veda, Cheema and myself shall form one group and Bhimsen of course will be there as part and parcel of the same. Ustadji then repeated the warning that we should confine to our group and should not try to mix up or even seek introduction from any other person undergoing training along with us. We were then told that it is going to be a three phase training and after each phase we shall be taken to the old man for an interview. Continuation of the training for the subsequent phase shall be strictly subject to the old man being satisfied about the progress shown in the preceding phase. A chilling warning followed this. If the old man is not happy about the progress, the training may not continue, but in that case there is going to be a serious problem. Without training being completed you are of no use to the MI. But having got to know so much about MI we also cannot leave you free as that might involve the risk of our activities being made public. In that case, the MI has to do something, Ustadji said emphasizing the word *something* not just by his manner of speaking but also by gestures with his eyes that were chilling and sarcastic. So, Ustadji clarified, that it was in our own interest to take the training seriously and complete it to the satisfaction of the old man.

The first phase of training Ustadji clarified, is going to be about the history of Islam, life of the Prophet, social customs of Muslims in India and Pakistan and of course elementary knowledge of reading and writing the Urdu language. Ustadji told that we were also to be taught the 'ada' of Nawaz (I felt irritated whenever Ustadji or some other army regulars referred to "Namaz' as 'Nawaz') and recitation of the 'Kalma'. At this point I intervened to tell the sardar that the correct pronunciation is 'qalema' and not 'kalma'. Ustadji suppressed his anger with great effort and told the others that Kishori will take less time in completing the lessons, as he already knows Urdu. "Kishori," Veda and Cheema exclaimed! So Ikramuddin's real name is Kishori. I could not help entering into a brief argument with Ustadji about concealing the real name from the members of our own group and argued that each member of the group must know everything about the others as the information would come in handy for use in case of any crisis or emergency. The focus now shifted to whether or not other members of the group should know the real name of each other. He agreed, but wanted some more time to be devoted to the business of names before proceeding further. Each one of us was to have a Muslim name by which we shall call each other during missions. It is better that we start using the muslim name from now on so that habit develops and no one is caught for such a simple slip of the tongue at crucial moments. Ustadji then gave us the story of one operative who was doing wonderful work, but was compromised under similar circumstances.

"That is alright Ustadji," I intervened, "But why have you given me this name Ikramuddin, I don't like it." Ustadji felt annoyed and yelled, "Oye aitthe tere phyo da raaj hai ki jo tainu pasand hai ohi karuga. Ai fauj da kam hai. Hukam de mutabik chalna payega." (This is not your father's house that you will dictate your choice. It is the Army and you are meant to obeying orders). I insisted that I didn't like this name and would prefer to be called Salim instead. I then pleaded with the sardar that there is no harm in allowing me the choice and in fact professional complications may actually arise if I am given the name that I detest as in that case I may some time subconsciously blurt out my real name. "Simple psychology," I pleaded and quite surprisingly Ustadji agreed instantly on the condition that I tell him the reason as to why I like the name Salim so much. I told him that our family

was as much devoted to the Sufis of the chishti order (Chishtia silsila) as to any God of the Hindu pantheon. Sheikh Salim Chishti was a shining star of the chishti order who was a noble soul gifted by God with powers of many miracles. I firmly believed that if I give myself the name of the great sufi saint my life shall always be protected from all risks and I shall never stray from the path of righteousness. "I allow you the name of your choice Kishori," Ustadji said without much of a fuss but also warned me not to sing songs in glory of those musalman faquirs as that might upset the old man and even lead him to suspect your commitment to the cause of the MI. I first thought of educating him about Sufism and how it is different from fundamentalist Islam but promptly decided to refrain as my attempt could be construed as another instance of indiscipline or arrogance.

Our real training had to now commence. While an Army regular taught Urdu, a Maulvi gave the us basic training in Islam. The Maulvi's name and other details were not disclosed to us. We were told that he is to be addressed by everyone as 'Maulvi sahab' and it was not necessary to know his name. We also didn't know from where he was brought. While some of us believed that he was an army regular appointed as a Maulvi in some unit mosque, others claimed that he was a fugitive from across the border who was caught illegally crossing the border by the PAP and placed at the disposal of the MI instead of being tried and jailed. The arrangement suited both, the Army who had in him an authentic trainer in Islamic religious practices as well as the Maulavi sahib who instead of being in a jail, was enjoying freedom no matter in howsoever small measure. The Maulvi was nevertheless a learned man who knew what he was supposed to be teaching. He taught us the basic teachings of the Holy Koran, the qalema and the outer movements as well as the prayers one is expected to recite silently within while offering the Namaz. I had known most of these things beforehand because of the liberal atmosphere in my family in which I was brought up and because some of my close friends happened to be practicing Muslims. The Maulavi also told us some of the most fascinating aspects of the life of the Prophet (PBH) signifying the spirit of tolerance he practiced and preached in stark contrast from the common perception that his teachings have the tendency to lead to some kind of religious fundamentalism.

While I very soon became his pet pupil because of my knowledge of Urdu and of the basic characteristics of Islam, I learnt that the Maulvi used to often find himself on the wrong side of the MI from Ustadji, right up to the old man because they wanted him to highlight the fundamentalist face of Islam to the recruits. Their argument was that when we are sent across the border for the mission, we have to penetrate the local population by mixing with ordinary Pakistanis, and that could only be achieved if we were trained to talk as muslim fanatics and not as erudite professors of theology eulogizing the liberal traditions of Islam. In fact most of the bigwigs in the MI were convinced that Islam was all about fanaticism and had no liberal face in reality. (Subsequently during my visits across the border I saw for myself how wrong the MI's perception of a common Pakistani being a fanatic was. I found majority of them cherishing the same liberal outlook of tolerance towards other religions which majority of Indians also cherish. One thing that I found common in both the countries was that while the common man on either side was liberal and tolerant, the establishment, particularly the security agencies in Pakistan, were full of bigoted fanatics, just as in India. They were packed with people who firmly believed that it is difficult for a person to be a follower of Islam and yet not be a religious fundamentalist. The relationship between the two countries is driven exclusively by these elements within the establishments on either side because of which the mistrust keeps proliferating. If somehow the common man comes to occupy the driver's seat, the entire complexion of Indo-Pak relations will change miraculously and the two countries shall start living like two brothers separated from each other, but brothers nonetheless.

While the others in my group were still undergoing their training in Urdu, the first phase of my training was declared to be complete by Ustadji who told me that very soon my long standing curiosity about the old man should be over as I was to be taken to him for an interview any day. When I asked if any date for the interview had been fixed, Ustadji asked me not to be silly. In the MI, dates are not fixed and communicated to the recruits. They are suddenly told to come along and taken to the old man. He then explained the rationale of the practice saying that if a recruit is actually a mole and we inform him of the program beforehand, he may pass on the information to the other side, in which case not only the location of our safe

houses but even the identity of senior officers may be compromised.

I was convinced about the logic and felt no need to argue any further on this point. I had started imparting lessons in Urdu to the others. By now I had settled into a routine when one day Ustadji told me as suddenly as he had said things have to be in an institution like the MI that I was to stay overnight in the office. When I asked the reason Ustadji reminded me that in MI the recruits are meant to give answers and not raise questions. He gave a brief impromptu lecture on how in spite of being a brilliant recruit I was harming my otherwise bright prospect in the MI by sticking to this bad habit of asking questions a bit too many without caring for the advice to the contrary having been given repeatedly by everyone from the CO down to the NCO. Having finished the sermon he showed his magnanimity by volunteering the information that sometime during the night I was to be taken to the old man for the interview. It is desirable that you remain in office, because if we go to pick you up from your residence, many people will see and your link with the MI could become known to outsiders, Ustadji elaborated. Ustadji asked me to go home and tell that I will be going out for a late night movie show with some friends and would stay overnight with them. Soon thereafter, a NCO dressed up in civvies – tight pants and a trendy long shirt, part of popular fashion amongst youngsters in the mid sixties – came on the scene and I was told to take him along. I'll go alone, I told Ustadji, I know the way to my house and don't need anyone to guide me. He is not going to show you the way to your house, Ustadji said coolly. He is going with you to see that you do not talk about anything more than what you have been told. He will keep a watch on what you talk and with whom you talk. In one stroke Ustadji had made me helpless and depressed once again.

Whatever I told at home, I believed my mother was aware that I was not staying away from home over night for a late night movie show. After I returned from home accompanied by the NCO dressed up as a friend of mine, I found that Ustadji was looking somewhat depressed. Perhaps it was a wihdrawal symptom, as Ustadji could not take his daily quota of XXX Rum because of the impending visit to the old man. I had no time or inclination to think of Ustadji or his withdrawal symptoms, as I was excited at the prospect of the mystery of the old man being solved shortly, as the repeated references to the old man without any clue to his

identity had made him some kind of a phantom. Besides, I had also been told that the decision on whether I shall continue with the training and be inducted in the MI depended completely on the old man's assessment of my success in the training. This too added to my anxiety and excitement.

It was a little past midnight when some one whom I had not seen earlier came and told Ustadji to come along and take the 'recruit' for the interview. We got into the jeep that had been brought by the visitor who was on the wheel. Unlike in the past when I used to be put in the rear of the jeep, Ustadji asked me to come on to the front seat and after I was seated, he too followed in on the same seat. (This was contrary to the prevailing practice of only one person occupying the front seat by the driver's side. I subsequently learnt that I was sandwiched between the driver and Ustadji to ensure that I do not escape by jumping out of the jeep en route. Such massive mistrust in some one whom you want to be 'your man' is simply ridiculous). After a short drive we were in front of a house in Sarawan village near Kartarpur on the Jalandhar Amritsar Road. It was a simple looking inconspicuous house with no sign of any link with the Army. Ustadji knocked gently and a person appearing to be an Army jawan opened the door. We were told to wait in the lobby which had a couple of chairs strewn around haphazardly. After some time, the person who had received us came again and signaled at Ustadji to go inside. We crossed another empty and unlit room and were ushered into the room in which the old man was waiting for us. In contrast with the rest of the house the room was well lit and luxuriously furnished. There were three persons out of which I knew two. These were the CO *saab* and the Maulvi. The third person was wearing spectacles and was tall, slim and reasonably handsome. I was sure he couldn't be the old man as he looked quite young, even younger than perhaps the CO *saab*. I was wrong.

This was the old man about whom I had heard so much all along these days. (I later on learnt that in some Army units the senior most officer is addressed as the old man as a mark of respect, irrespective of his actual age). Ustadji stood in attention and gave a smart salute to the old man. I followed suit almost instinctively. The old man was upset and immediately gave a dressing down to the CO and Ustadji using the choicest abuses as common in Army circles as terms

of endearment are in the civil society. "Is this the training you f*ckers have given him?" the old man thundered and promptly turned towards me saying, "Look son, your trainers should have told you that you are not supposed to salute. In fact you are not supposed to do any thing that might betray your link with the Army. You have to remember that you are a civilian and a muslim from Pakistan who hates everything Indian, most of all the Indian Army and you are supposed to know one and only one greeting, "salamwalequm"." I felt reassured by the old man's sweet disposition towards me and marveled at the way in which he swung from extreme temper to equally extreme composure.

A brief discussion on various aspects of Islamic culture and the social customs of the muslims of the subcontinent, particularly the muslims from the Punjab followed in which the old man was asking questions and I was answering with the Maulavi butting in mostly to confirm that what I was stating was correct and occasionally also saying politely though that the old man was far from being correct. The old man was apparently upset on being told that he was incorrect irrespective of his rank, but was successful in not letting his annoyance show. He however could not hide his feeling of annoyance at my habit of questioning the accuracy of whatever the old man told me and at times even declaring him wrong by quoting proper references from the authentic sources. (I gradually learnt that this habit of getting annoyed with a junior if he dared to speak out his mind was rampant not just in the MI but also in the entire rank and file of the Armed Forces, perhaps the world over. After being captured by the Pakistanis I found the same scenario in Pakistan as well). I finally adjusted myself to these harsh realities and started toeing the seniors' line in the name of discipline. How the change came about and whether it came about of my own volition or otherwise is an interesting story that I shall share a little later.

After a marathon session lasting for over three hours, the old man nodded in approval and told the CO that I seemed to be doing quite well and should continue with the next phase of the training. Then, as if on second thoughts he asked the CO if I my conduct had been observed after I had been given XXX Rum. On being replied in the negative the old man advised the CO to try that method as well. He then turned towards me and offered me a drink. I refused, swearing that in my

family it was a taboo and a big no no. "Is committing a murder acceptable or a taboo in your family?" he asked in a matter of fact manner. Of course unacceptable in toto I said. But here in the MI, in the course of your duties and for the sake of the motherland you may have to even commit murder, the old man retorted swiftly and added, will you then flinch in the name of your family tradition in such a situation. I was equally swift in answering that if it came to doing something for the sake of the motherland then 'no holds barred' was the tradition of my family. OK then come on and take it as it is a part of your training for the sake of the motherland and signaled the orderly standing with a glass filled with rum in an elegant looking silver tray. I picked up the glass and gulped down the first sip of alcohol in my life.

While attending my automobile diploma course I had heard from some older boys that the taste of alcohol, particularly XXX Rum was very bitter, but this one tasted bizarre. I had also heard that under the influence of alcohol one starts feeling euphoric and carefree to the point of being defiant, but the effect the drink had on me was different. I did feel euphoric but instead of defiance I felt as if I was becoming submissive and my bad habit of questioning everything or proving the seniors wrong was on the decline. "Jee Zanab" (yes sir!) was the only word I was uttering in response to whatever was said to me by the old man or the CO. (Afterwards some old hands told me that some kind of a drug was administered with the Rum to those recruits who were found suitable except for their probing habit. The drug induced submissiveness and acceptance of authority. I am not aware whether attitudes can be manipulated therapeutically as I have had no occasion to talk it over to psychiatric experts, but this is something that needs to be probed and regulated in accordance with norms of medical ethics).

We were already in the wee hours of the morning when the old man signaled that the day's (or more appropriately the night's) business was over and we could leave. I suddenly remembered that for the last so many months I had continued to wonder about the identity of the old man and felt strongly that before leaving I must ask the question to none other than the old man himself. As others were retreating from the room, I stood still and shot off, "Zenab, da isme gharami?" (What's your good name, sir?) Everyone was stunned at the indiscretion shown

by me. Asking some one his name in the MI is considered an impropriety and asking the name of an officer as senior as the old man, blasphemous. Surprisingly, the old man took no exception and, instead he looked visibly pleased, perhaps because I had spoken exactly like the Punjabi Muslims on the other side of the border and that seemed to have impressed him. He walked over to me, put his hand on my shoulders and replied softly, "I am Brigadier NK Lall and it is a pleasure to see one of our recruits speaking with such perfection." (I was to realize later that this single moment of glory had made me a VIP of sorts for a long time to come in the MI). "Meharbani zenabdi" (So nice of you, sir) I said once again in a manner matching perfectly with our Muslim brethren across the border and left along with Ustadji and the driver who had brought us from Jallandar. The way I had impressed the old man during my interview brought about perceptible change in Ustadji's behavior towards me as he started treating me as an equal. He took me to his living quarters, offered tea and biscuits and informed that the second phase of the training could be somewhat tough. "Please don't have any misunderstandings about me," he pleaded. "In the second part of your training I may have to put you through some rigors which may appear very harsh, but I shall be acting strictly as per the call of my duty." I promised never to have any hard feelings against the jovial sardar for anything done by him as part of my training for the mission and left for home.

The next week or so was completely eventless as I would go to office, impart lessons in Urdu to the other recruits and come back home before it was dark. Suddenly one night there was a knock at my room around some time past midnight. (As my mother was in the know of things I had by now developed a system whereby such nightly visitors would come and knock at my room so that other members of the family were neither disturbed nor aware of the visitors). The caller was a stranger, but I knew the driver and therefore accompanied them. I thought we were heading towards the office, but felt surprised to see the jeep driving at neck breaking speed on the Jallandar – Amritsar highway. My repeated queries about where we were going and why we were going whereever we were going evoked no response from the driver or the stranger accompanying us. Both of them were behaving like dumb brutes. When I raised my voice the stranger

took out a revolver and placing it on my left temple asked me to keep my mouth shut. If you open your mouth again the bullet will be flying through the interior of you brain. I pleaded with the driver to say if the stranger was an enemy agent abducting us. The driver kept mum. I was by now excited with violent feelings. "Listen," I told the driver, "If you keep quiet any longer I will take it that you too are an enemy agent and even if I die I shall throw both of you down from this speeding jeep and make sure that both of you are dead or atleast crippled for the rest of your lives." The threat worked and the driver simply muttered that neither he nor the stranger was any outsider. "We are only conducting your training as per directions of senior officers," he finished. After driving non-stop for over two hours the jeep stopped at a desolate and lonely place. The stranger now took over and pointing the revolver once again to my forehead commanded me to start running. As I hesitated for a second he gave a hard punch in my face with the butt of the revolver and warned that unless I started running he would shoot me. I asked the reason why I should run and what will happen if I find myself stranded at this lonely place in the middle of nowhere. The stranger was chillingly curt and told me not to waste any more time as the very next moment he would shoot me from point blank range if I didn't start running. I was puzzled and scared and started running. After a few seconds some 5-6 shadowy figures appeared from no where in the darkness and they started beating me with belts, chains and sticks hurling the choicest Punjabi abuses at the same time. They beat me black and blue and vanished as suddenly as they had appeared.

It was pitch dark all around. The place was completely deserted and filled with an eerie silence. I kept lying on the ground, writhing in pain and not knowing whom to call for help or what to do. Because of severe pain caused by the heavy beating I was feeling extremely weak and thirsty but I had no strength left to get up. Nor was there a drop of water anywhere around. I thought my attackers will come back and kill me and even if they don't come I will die in any case because of the beating and thirst. I was feeling completely helpless and miserable. My mother would often tell me that in times of extreme crisis and total helplessness one must start praying to God with all force of mind and heart. These prayers never go unanswered. I remembered her advice and started praying to God by reciting the

hanuman chalisa. The prayers were answered as soon after Cheema appeared on the scene. He picked me up and helped me walk for about a kilometer to a PAP post which meant we were somewhere near the Indo-Pak border. (In those days the BSF didn't exist and the task of border security rested solely on the PAP or the Punjab Armed Police). I asked Cheema what was happening, who were the people who beat me up and left me alone to die and how did he come to help me. Cheema pleaded total ignorance and said that he was brought to the PAP post by Ustadji for some training and on reaching the post he told me to walk in the direction given by him and see what I (Kishori) was doing. Cheema also told that he had no idea about my having been subjected to beating and much less the reasons for the same. In fact he was totally foxed to see all this.

At the PAP post Ustadji was waiting. He offered me a glass of water, asked the post incharge to get some tea and asked me to relax. I was still out of my breath and completely unnerved. What is happening, I wanted to know from Ustadji without any efforts to hide my anguish. Ustadji looked cool and unfazed asking me to just cool down and not create a scene before outsiders. Turning towards the PAP man-in-charge of the post Ustadji introduced me as one of the new entrants to the Army at Amritsar who was suffering from sleep walk as well as hallucinations. "In the Army we are all like brothers and in case of any problem with anyone the others rush to help out. It is only because of this tradition of the Army that I rushed to lookout for him the moment I got to know that he had once again walked off in his sleep. While talking to the PAP man Ustadji quietly and cleverly signaled to me not to contradict him. Having finished his impromptu short story on my sleep walk and hallucinations Ustadji turned towards me and added, winking mischievously, "Kaka, why are you so nervous? We are all there to help you out of any problem howsoever big. Just relax and we shall talk about everything that is bothering your mind." I took it as a signal that it would be only appropriate if I didn't talk in the presence of the PAP personnel about the state I had been through. As I was still not sure about what precisely could be the background leading to these traumatic events, I gave the benefit of the doubt to Ustadji and agreed not to talk on the subject until we got some privacy with no outsider around.

We quickly finished the cup of tea offered by the PAP officer-in-charge of the

border post and boarded the jeep waiting outside in which Ustadji seemed to have come. It was different from the jeep in which I was brought by the stranger and the driver too was different. As I had been dying to talk to Ustadji at the earliest opportunity to clear the position, I shot off a volley of questions at him. What is all this happening? Why was I picked by the driver in the dead of night only to be dropped in this desolate place and that too after being subjected to severe beating after being made to run for my life? Who was the stranger in the jeep in which I was picked up from my home? Why was I beaten up and left in wilderness to die? How did you know where I was? My questions were unending. Ustadji kept on listening patiently and reacted only when I had stopped. "Oye bass vi kar hun kaka. Apni hi dasda rahega ya kuchh saddi vi sunega? (Hold on now little boy. Will you keep on speaking or give a chance to me also to reply to your questions.) Look here Kishori don't get upset as this is all part of your training, Ustadji wanted to clarify. "Training," I shot back, "You try to kill a man and call that part of training? Do you think I will buy that line?" Ustadji was cool and offered to explain the reason why even such bizarre activities could be part of training. "Listen Kishori," he started, "You know you are being trained for ultimately crossing over to Pakistan on missions where you have to operate in an unknown territory in the midst of strangers. An operative has to have nerves of steel and be capable of keeping his cool in the face of absolutely unforeseen and unforeseeable crises. Through training like this we want to firm up your stamina to face crises. We also want to see whether you get so nervous as to blurt out things you are not supposed to divulge under pressure in situations like this. Also we do not disclose these parts of training in advance as that takes away the element of surprise without which the training remains not only incomplete but also ineffective. I hope you understand it".

I could not question the logic advanced by Ustadji but I also knew that this was a little too much for me. I therefore told Ustadji that whatever the compulsions of the MI, I can no longer put up with such atrocities in the name of training. "You know those fellows bashed me up with belts, rods and chains mercilessly as if I were a dead log of wood. I have bruises all over and each joint, each bone of mine is cracking within. Ustadji, I am sorry but I am not game any longer. I want

to leave the training and give up everything that has anything to do with your MI." As I ended I could see the contours of Ustadji's face changing rapidly from shock, surprise and disbelief to anger even as the simple sardar made vain efforts to conceal his feelings. "Are you in your senses Kishori? You want to dissociate yourself from the MI? Dissociate! Now at this stage when you have come to know so much about MI, its officers, staff, drivers, cooks and above all its sources and operatives. Kishori you must be a fool to believe that you will be allowed to leave the MI now. Have you heard of something called a point of no return? Well your relationship with the MI has reached that stage even if you have not heard of it." Ustadji suddenly became stiff with seriousness on his face and said without mincing words, "Look *kaka*! You are as dear to me as my own brother but I am a soldier first and anything else later. As a soldier it is my duty to warn you never to think of giving up the MI now. You joined us of your own free will but once having exercised that option now it is no longer up to your sweet will. Kishori, have you heard that famous saying about a tiger's den? It is said that outside a tiger's den you can see the footprints of animals going in but you never see any footprints of anyone ever coming out. *Kaka*! the MI is a tiger's den. You can see people getting in but you can't see any sign of their getting out from here." Ustadji finished, trying unsuccessfully to make the tense atmosphere light.

When we reached office dawn had already cracked and people could be seen moving out on the road for fetching milk or dropping children to schools. I was still dazed and traumatized, my whole body aching because of the severe beating suffered at the hands of people I didn't know. Ustadji quickly arranged for some hot tea and biscuits. (The office of MI was different from what offices are normally as this office could easily double up as a temporary home with all arrangements for cooking and even sleeping overnight in case need arose. These adhoc facilities were actually used frequently for the benefit of the recruits who might be required to stay overnight for training purpose. Later on I also learnt that the facilities were also utilized for 'sources' coming from across the border). I was asked to take a bath or at least wash my face so that I looked normal. When I came out of the bath room after a short bath I found that the nursing orderly whom I had seen earlier in the MH was also present.(Perhaps it was standard practice for the paramedics to

be made available after these horrendous training sessions). He examined me and handed some painkillers apart from some words of consolation and motivation. "Don't worry, you are fighting fit," the nursing orderly said. "There are no fractures, not even any sprains, just some artificial cuts and bruises which should be alright in a day or two." The nursing orderly switched from a medic to a preacher and suddenly started lecturing on the virtues of service to the motherland and how youngsters have a special duty cast upon them for the same. As I had still not been able to come to terms with what had happened to me just the night before I felt irritated and asked the nursing orderly to please leave me alone as his work was already over. Once alone with Ustadji, I told him again – this time politely – to please do something whereby I could get rid of the MI. "I promise and swear in whosoever's name you want me to swear that till my last breath I shall never tell anyone whatever I have seen or learnt during my brief association with the MI. Please sardarji, you have called me your younger brother, have mercy on me and do something to help me out of this mess," I beseeched.

"Firstly Kishori, I don't agree with you that you have put yourself in a mess. The MI is not a mess, it is a wonderful organization," Ustadji replied. "Secondly, I will advice you never to think of getting out of the organization now. And mind you Kishori, I am giving this advice to you as your own brother because I know it is against your own interest to think of quitting now, because if others in the MI come to know that you are planning to quit, the decision might be taken to eliminate you. If one starts thinking of quitting, the organization takes it, rightly or wrongly, as a sure sign of the chap planning a doublecross, and after having spent sometime inside the MI I am sure you know by now that the punishment for double cross is nothing but death. As the courts take a long time in deciding cases and in some cases death penalty or for that matter any penalty may not even be awarded after that long trial, it is considered perfectly ethical for some MI insider to inflict the penalty on the traitor by shooting him and giving all kinds of alibis to explain the incident." But you know sardarji that I am not a traitor, I simply want to quit because I am not comfortable with this kind of training," I pleaded once again. Ustadji's response was cold and to the point. "I know that you are not a traitor but there are many others who do not know and who would not like to take chances with a

recruit having been exposed to inside information to be at large and be a potential source for the other side," Ustadji said and continued, "See Kishori, if you persist I will have no option but to tell the CO of your intentions and do as he orders me to do and in the meantime I'll not let you leave this room." "Will you shoot me if your boss asks you to shoot me," I asked. "Yes of course," was the brief reply. As a last ditch effort I wanted to see if I could cash on the sardar's sentimentality in my favor and said, "that means Ustadji you have no faith in me." "I trust you *kaka*, and that is why I am peruading you to throw these crazy ideas out of your head. Had it been some one other than you I would have locked the fellow right in this room and already reported him to the CO but as far as you are concerned I am prepared to let you go and forget everything if you give me your word that you are no longer thinking of quitting." I knew I didn't have many options and promised that I was no longer reluctant to continue with the MI. "I trust you for your word and don't betray my trust *kaka*," I heard Ustadji saying rather emotionally as I was coming out to go home. I too had made up my mind to stick on to the MI as much for my own life as for the word of honor I had given to Ustadji.

When I had gone for the interview with the old man I was cleared by him for starting the second phase of my training. The midnight bash inflicted upon me was actually the beginning of the second phase. It was by and large uneventful except for one incident that I shall recount a little later.

The routine happenings first. The second phase was primarily for testing and consolidating physical endurance and stamina. I used to be subjected to severe beatings and various kinds of torture, ranging from very mild to severe and at times, even cruel. The forms of torture included, among other things, someone catching me by the scruff of my neck and forcing my head under water in a canal somewhere near the Indo-Pak border. Normally the training sessions were concluded within daytime and in the evening I would go home like any other office or college-goer. One night there was a knock on my door. It was a little earlier than midnight. It was the driver from office. He wanted me to come along as the CO had something urgent to talk to me. "Where is the CO?" I asked. "He is at 'Sarawan' with the old man," the driver replied. I got into the jeep but after a little while I realized that jeep was going in a different direction. "Where are

we going?" I asked but the driver kept quiet. I repeated the question umpteen times but the driver neither stopped nor opened his mouth. He simply kept on driving. I was already feeling somewhat heavy in the head because of having been pulled out of sleep and the driver's silence was adding to my discomfiture when I found that we were no longer on the highway. Instead we were driving along a narrow gravel road that was completely deserted. The driver suddenly stopped, asked me to get down and help him with my automobile skills as he felt there was some trouble in the carburetor. As I got down he climbed back to the wheel and told me to watch out whether it was the self starter or the carburetor that was troubling. He applied the ignition key, it started well and before I could say bravo, the devil had simply sped off at neck-breaking speed. Within no time he was out of sight, leaving me stranded in this lonely spot. As I stood trying to figure out things, a posse of heavily armed PAP jawans surrounded me. 'Hands Up! You Pakistani," the platoon commander yelled. I am not a Pakistani, I said. "Every Pakistani whom we catch says so," the platoon commander asserted and gave a hard slap on my face. His men followed suit and within moments I found myself surrounded by burly sardars kicking and punching me left, right and center with a generous sprinkling of choicest abuses in Punjabi involving almost every conceivable female relations. One jawan who appeared to be quite elderly was extraordinarily enthusiastic in raining hard blows on my body. While beating he was also shouting abuses and screaming "You swine! You killed my *tayaji* in the most brutal fashion in my native village Choniyan near Lahore and also took away all our gold and cash. I will make pulp out of you and not leave you alive today." "Please believe me, I am not a Pakistani and I have not even heard the name of this village chuniya or choniya where you say I killed your *tayaji*," I pleaded with the group and prayed for mercy. "And Sardarji, please look at my age," I turned to the elderly jawan, "I was not even five when partition took place. How could I kill your *tayaji* in any case." The group was not impressed.

After they had got themselves tired of beating me, the platoon commander told his men to relax for a while and then resume the beating. As his men obeyed the command, he turned to me saying, "OK, you are saying you are not a Pakistani, then tell us your identity. Who are you and why you are here next to the zero line

on the Indo-Pak border?" I was about to flaunt my MI connections to impress the platoon commander when I remembered the first lesson of my training that our identity as a MI operative should not be disclosed under any circumstances to any one, not even to senior officers of the Army, unless they belong to the MI. I therefore decided to abide by the dictates of my professional commitment to the MI and not to disclose my identity or the reasons why and how I reached up to that spot where I was captured. "I cannot tell you my identity, but I can swear that I am not a Pakistani," I said trying to add strength to my feeble voice. The platoon commander was furious and I thought he was sure to kill me. "We had information from a very responsible person from the Army about your attempt to infiltrate today from this sector," he said, "and we would have killed you but for the instruction given to us by the Army man that you should be captured alive and handed over to the him for interrogation in Army custody. He should be reaching any time and we shall hand you over to him." I had now started to vaguely understanding that this too could be a part of the training and the 'responsible army man' could be none other than Ustadji or the driver. As far as I was concerned I had some reason to feel relaxed but the PAP group's anger and excitement was far from over. They continued to hurl abuses at me, each man recounting the travails of his friends and relatives at the time of partition 'because of these bloody *katuwas*'. Every now and then some one in the group would hit me with the rifle butt or punch with bare hands and kick as if I were a stray dog making a thorough nuisance of myself. Nevertheless I was no longer afraid for my life because I knew for sure that I could not be killed, as instructions from Army were clear that the 'intruder' was to be captured and kept alive.

When the PAP platoon had completely tired itself by beating and abusing me I was tied with thick rope to a huge tree just opposite their field tent with four heavily armed personnel standing guard. Occasionally some one or the other from amongst the guards would come near me, hit, abuse or spit in my face holding me responsible for murders and dacoities committed at the time of partition, knowing well that I could at best be a toddler wetting nappies in my mother's lap at that time. "If not you, some one from your community' was the simple logic they applied while not only convicting me of the crimes I never committed but also

executing the sentence almost instantly. Winter had already set in and standing out in the open, tied to a tree was turning out to be a veritable torture. I pleaded with the guards to give me some blanket or sheet so that I could cover my body because of the cold weather and to let me at least sit down, as I was feeling too weak to stand. One of the guards who was most vociferous about the mayhem and kiilings by the muslims during partition retaliated by taking off my shirt and hitting with the butt of his rifle shouting at the same time, "You Pakistani, when you crossed over did you think that we shall receive you as if you have come in a *baraat* (marriage party)? Now keep shut and don't you sit down or else I shall break your legs."

I was about to collapse when the roar of a jeep was heard. Yes, it was our office jeep and Ustadji who got down from the front seat appeared no less than a messiah to me. Till now I had always seen Ustadji, like all other staffers of the MI in civvies, but today he was in the full uniform of the Indian Army, complete with a stripe and two stars signifying his rank of a JCO. He looked smarter than his usual self. He didn't look at me except for a passing wink that no one in the PAP platoon noticed. Straightway addressing the platoon commander, Ustadji said loudly, "So this is the bloody Pakistani about whom we had advance information. He is a prized catch and I'll tell Colonel Sahab to recommend some suitable reward for your platoon from your IG for this wonderful task done so well." The platoon commander blushed saying, "It is so nice of you to have appreciated our work subedar sahib. As regards the reward, well we have already had some by thrashing this swine the whole night." The PAP sepoy who was most enthusiastic in thrashing and abusing me intervened to say how highly satisfied he felt after getting a chance for taking revenge for his *tayaji's* murder at the hands of "these scoundrels". Ustadji looked somewhat worried perhaps thinking that I might ask him to vouch before the PAP platoon that I was not a Pakistani. He paused for a while and told the platoon commander that as per intelligence available to the Army, I was not an ordinary infiltrator as I held some important position in the Pakistani defence establishment, because of which I had to be treated carefully. "I hope you haven't inflicted any serious injuries on him as that might blow up as a big international issue?" he asked the platoon commander. "No subedar sahib,

I had told my jawans about the instructions you had conveyed the previous night and my men were careful. But they are also human beings. Their blood boils at the very sight of a Pakistani as each one of my men has had some near and dear ones brutalized and killed by these rascals. It was just some hard slaps, punches and kicks, nothing more. You need not worry, the bastard is not going to die." "Aur jehdi tussi mainu gala kaddiyan?" (And what about the abuses you hurled at me), it was now my turn to butt in. "Chup kar oye soor de putt, Rabb da shukar kar ke tu halle vi jinda hai. Je subedar sab sanu nahi dass de ta assan tainu maar sutt na si," the PAP commander roared. (Oh you shut up you swine! Thank your stars that we only hurled abuses at you. Had subedar sahib not instructed to handover you alive we would have killed you).

Ustadji declined the offer of a second cup of tea from the PAP men on the pretext of being in a hurry, as he had to report the achievement to the CO. He requested the platoon in charge to lend the ropes used for tying me to the tree, as I had to be tied again to the rear seat of his jeep. "I could not bring any armed guards with me as the entire operation has to be kept secret and senior officers have instructed involvement of minimum possible persons so that the secret is well maintained," he offered to explain as to why if I was such a dreaded catch, the Army had not arranged for an armed picket of guards. I kept quiet as by now I had become wiser and knew that the operation is actually a part of my training that could not be disclosed to an outside agency like the PAP. As Ustadji took to the wheel, the PAP personnel started tying me to the rear seat of the jeep hurling out abuses and occasionally giving a slap here and a punch there. After driving for about a kilometer Ustadji stopped the jeep at a lonely place, came over to the rear, untied me and asked me to sit comfortably. Shaking me by the hand like a long lost friend having been reunited, Ustadji winked and said, "Muaf Karin kaka, ae sab teri training layi ho raya hai." (Forgive me young man all this is a part of your training). By now cynicism had become so ingrained in me that I had ceased to react to the hardships inflicted in the name of training or the apologies offered by Ustadji. I just kept quiet and threw a brief smile at him to reassure him that I was not annoyed.

Instead of driving to the office Ustadji drove straight to the CO's residence and

reported everything in the minutest details to him. From the way the conversation was going on I could see that the CO was mainly interested in knowing whether at any stage of my captivity I had said anything that might even remotely indicate that I had some link with the MI. After Ustadji confirmed, reconfirmed and re-reconfirmed that I had not even uttered the word MI throughout my overnight captivity in spite of all the beating, torture and abuses, the CO walked up to me, shook my hand and said, "Congratulations Kishori! You have successfully completed the second phase of your training. The third phase will start after three-four days and during the interval you relax and enjoy. Come to office everyday to help the other recruits learn Urdu but be relaxed."

The third phase of training was by and large drab. It comprised of lectures (mostly one-on-one talks) by Ustadji and sometimes by the CO about the composition of the Pakistani Army, their rank structure and insignia of different regiments and formations. The CO also explained about the deployment of various Pakistani combat formations in different sectors on the Indo-Pak border along the Punjab, their manpower strength and the kind of equipments the GHQ had provided to different formations. It is during this phase that I found out about the high level of professional knowledge of Ustadji and the CO. They were well informed about the latest deployment of these formations, their manpower strength, as well as equipment and the precise location of each formation that they used to pinpoint with utmost accuracy with the help of a huge map of the Pakistani side of the border. Occasionally the CO would also show photographs of the senior commanders of the Pakistani Army formations deployed along the border. In those days the success or failure of such briefings depended largely on the communication skills of the individual giving the briefing as computers were unheard of and power point presentations, laser pointers and LCD display screens completely unimaginable. The CO and ustadji both had commendable communication skills and could successfully convey whatever they wanted to be conveyed to the recruits. If I remember the details told during those briefings reasonably well till today, after more than 40 years, it is as much because of my good memory as because of the high level of skills of the trainers.

The CO also briefed about the organizational structure of the MI, particularly

about its External Wing. It was told that the External Wing had to be strengthened by the MI because the IB who was given the task earlier was found wanting in more than one ways. The intelligence provided by the IB was sketchy, unreliable and mostly unactionable. Their operatives generally consisted of illiterate country folks from the border area who knew neither the significance of their job nor the methods to go about it effectively. Perhaps this was so because the greater part of the funds provided by the Government for intelligence gathering was misutilised by the senior officers, leaving only a small portion with which they could only hire cheap labor and not skilled manpower. (Perhaps the dismal record of performance by the IB also accounts for the creation of the RAW by completely taking away the external intelligence from the IB). The CO used to narrate these facts probably with a view to motivate us for better performance so that the MI could proudly tell the Government that we were doing a better job than those from whom it was taken away.

These sessions didn't last long and the CO told me one day that my training was 'more or less over.' All that remained was to take me once again for an interview with the old man and await his instructions for further action.

7

Launching The Mission

The much-awaited call for the final interview with the old man came sooner than I had expected. One evening when I had just returned from office after doing the daily round of voluntary service to teach Urdu to the other recruits, the driver came to pick me up as Ustadji wanted me to return to office immediately. From the office we drove straight to village 'Sarawan' to meet the old man. By the time we reached 'Sarawan' it was well past 9.30 pm. No time was wasted in waiting or protocols unlike my first visit, as we were ushered immediately in the to room where the CO and the old man seemed to be waiting. He wasn't stiff this time and instead tried to appear amiable and friendly. "Ki haal ne kaka? Khush?" he addressed me. (How are you young man, happy?) "Meharbani janab di" (All well because of your kindness) I replied as mechanically as the question was put to me. "Kaka CO saab kende ne assi tainu fauz da pakka jasoos bana ditta hai, hoon tu sair karn nu tyar hoja." (The CO says we have now trained you fully for spying on behalf of the Army, now you get ready for a trip across the border). The old man continued, "Mainu halle tak appointment letter nahi milya, O kam kadun tak ho jaye ga?" (I haven't as yet got my appointment letter, by when should I expect that?) I asked. "Oye tu aehoji kamli gallan kyun karda ha, mai ta sunya si tu vadda des bhagt hai, aehoji madi gall kiwen kiti tu. Pailan kam ta shuru kar desh di kuch seva kar." (Why are you talking nonsense? I had heard that you are a patriot. How can you talk such trash? First do some service for your country and show some results.) In the heart of hearts I knew that they want to take work from me without any record of my employment with them, but I was helpless. By now I had already come to know that it is well nigh impossible for me to even think of distancing myself from the MI because of the risks involved in such an idea as had been made clear repeatedly by Ustadji. I therefore decided to play ball and

said, "Desh di seva? Bass janab da hukam aan di der hai. Maen ta tyaar baitha haan." (I am always ready for any service to the motherland. All that is needed is an order from your good self.)

The old man looked quite pleased and said before giving any task he would like to talk to me about some important things and turned the entire conversation about my knowledge of automobiles. "*Kaka,* tell me, if a heavy vehicle suddenly stops and refuses to pick up again, what could be the probable cause?" he asked. "Refuses to pick up means what; is it starting but thereafter not moving or whether the ignition is also missing?" I asked. "The ignition is ok, but after ignition it smokes a lot and doesn't move," he replied. I knew that in case of an ordinary motorcar this could be due to either a broken axle or due to some problem in the gearbox and therefore asked whether the automobile he was referring to was a car or something else. The old man's reply was quick, "No, not a car; it's a tank." "In that case it is a problem of the gear box for sure," was my equally prompt reply. The old man smiled and asked the CO what the EME thought about this problem. On being told that the EME's diagnosis was exactly the same he said he agreed that I knew my trade well. The interview seemed to be coming to a close as the old man nodded in approval of my selection and told the CO, "Changa, ainu tussi launch kar sakde ho." (OK you can launch him.)

Nothing happened for nearly a week. Thereafter one evening I got a message that Ustadji wanted to see me urgently. When I met him I was told that I had to go to Amritsar by bus the same night and I might be required to be away from home for at least three months. I told my father that I had to go out for some training but when my mother called me aside and spoke to me in privacy I told her where and why I was going. I packed up my bags and left for office where Ustadji, Veda and Cheema were already present. Ustadji told that the three of us – Veda, Cheema and myself were to board the midnight bus for Amritsar. We were told that further instructions were to be given to us by some one who shall meet us at the Amritsar bus stand. He also told me that I should not give exact details of the timing of my movement or the places that I was to visit to anyone including my parents or my elder brother. I was outwardly looking relaxed, but within me there was a storm about the uncertainty that the future held for me. I was not at all scared of any risks

to my life but the feeling of uncertainty is what bugged me the most. Therefore to make the environment light I said jokingly that the CO has warned me against disclosing the details to my parents or elder brother, but he has issued no such warning about my girlfriend. Does that mean that I can disclose everything to her I asked joking. The Ustadji's response was so chilling that instead of making me feel light it simply added to my nervousness. "Don't forget Kishori that the MI is a highly professional organization and before we repose confidence in an operative we collect so much information about him that we know more of him than he himself does. We know that you don't as yet have a girlfriend but we wish you had some, as that would have made things easier for us. While launching you for a mission we would have taken her in our safe custody and told you to just think of her before you ever think of doublecrossing the MI." The joke thus ended up making me feel more nervous and I almost instantly resolved never to utter even a single syllable unnecessarily; not even as a joke.

The bus stand of Jallandar Cantt was not a new place for me as I used to pass by it almost daily while going to attend my diploma classes in the city. Every now and then we used to come here to catch the bus to Nandachur, our native place in the adjoining Hoshiarpur District. But that night it looked scary and awesome. While waiting for the midnight bus to Amritsar alongwith Veda and Cheema I continued to feel nervous and scared. Because of the nervousness I was not my usual chirpy self. But whatever little I talked to my other two soon to be co-passengers gave me the impression that Cheema's condition was no better than mine, even though Veda appeared to be normal. His normalcy however appeared more like a feeling of resignation than of relaxation. (I subsequently learnt that unlike the two of us – Cheema and myself – Veda had been across the border earlier also). The instructions to us were that we should board the midnight bus that would reach Amritsar in the early hours of the morning. At the bus stop at Amritsar we were to be contacted by someone who would give us further instructions. As we were told that we had never seen before the person who was to contact us at Amritsar, I asked Ustadji how would we know him.

Ustadji's reaction was angry and he admonished me for not giving up the bad habit of putting too many questions. "Have confidence in the MI Kishori," Ustadji

said adding, and "we are capable of anticipating these small problems and do the needful. We have made all arrangements to see that the person knows how to locate you and contact you; you don't have to bother your head with these details. These are 'adam matters' (army slang for administrative matters) and none the business of johnnies like you." I was in no mood to be bullied in this fashion and retorted as hard as I could. "Ustadji, try to understand the real sense of what I have in mind," I said. "Your man will contact us because he knows how to contact, but we do not know who your man is. Therefore how shall we know if the man contacting us as your man is genuine or he is an enemy Agent? Suppose what you have told your man about us has been intercepted by the other side, or suppose your man himself decides to give us away for some reason or the other and passes on the details to some enemy agent and asks him to take us away and hand us over to the MI of the enemy side; how are we to know or for that matter how you in the MI going to know what has happened to us. So please Ustadji have no ego hassles and give us at least some clue whereby we can rest assured that the person contacting us at Amritsar is the one who is actually supposed to contact us and not a hoax or an enemy agent." Ustadji was visibly bowled over and instantly hugged me saying, "Yaar Kishori, tu boht vadda genius banda hai. Kaka mann gaye tennu. Oye tu ta appne ustadan da vi ustaad hai." (Kishori dear, hats off to you! You know how to surpass your own instructors in the trade.) We were then given some clues about how to satisfy ourselves that the person approaching us at Amritsar was the one the MI had designated for the purpose and not a hoax or an enemy agent.

The three of us boarded the overcrowded bus to Amritsar. The passengers were mostly village folk from rural Punjab wanting to make it to the Golden temple well in time for the early morning 'Ardass' (prayer) at the holiest shrine of the Sikhs. The pilgrims were in groups of threes and fours. One group was arguing loudly whether they will make it in time for the 'parkash' (the daily ritual of the holy Guru Granth Sahab being brought in a procession from the Akaal Takht to Harmandir Sahab early in the morning). I spontaneously joined the discussion and told the group that it was difficult for them to be in time for the 'parkash', but they will certainly be in time for the 'Ardass'. For a moment I forgot everything and started

reciting some of the prominent and popular verses normally recited during the Ardass ceremony every morning. The pilgrims seemed impressed and the elderly among the lot showered blessings for a long life to 'this kaka' (young boy) inspite of his young age and being a non-sikh was so religious. The oldest man in the group came to me, started caressing my head and said, "Wahe Guru tainu lambi umar deve kaka. Kalangiyan wala tainu har musibat taun bacha ke rakhe." (May the Holy Guru give you a long life and protect you from all problems in life.) He then added as if on prompting from some divine intuition, "Kaka, jindagi vich kinni vi musibat aan, wahe guru da bharosa kade vi na chhaddin." (Young boy! Even if you have to face the worst of crises in life you should never lose faith in the all powerful Guru.) I decided that the first thing I shall do on reaching Amritsar was to visit the Golden temple and pay obeisance to the Wahe Guru.

When the bus reached Amritsar it was dawn. The place was reverbirating with the melodious shabad kirtan (recitation from the Granth Sahab) from almost every nook and corner. Most of the shopkeepers in and around the bus stand had tuned in to the Amritsar station of All the India Radio broadcasting the recitation. Some were also playing prerecorded cassettes of the kirtan. (Even though cassette players were costly and rare in those days and certainly not as common as they are these days.) Groups of persons, mostly village folk arriving in the holy city by early morning buses were singing along with the radio and the cassette players filling the air with the blissful melody of the devotional music unique to the Sikh religion to such an extent that the heavy early morning chirping of birds flying out of their nests in large numbers for their daily wherewithal of physical survival too sounded like a part and parcel of the shabad kirtan. For a moment I forgot that unlike most of the passengers coming in busloads I had not come to the holy city as a pilgrim and spontaneously joined the others in singing aloud the devotional verses being aired by the radios around. My trance was broken by the rather rude call from a stranger who came near me and asked "Salim?" I responded by asking the question ustadji had suggested as clue for satisfying that the person was the one actually deputed by the MI and finally said "Yes! I am Salim." Throughout this conversation I failed to notice that the old Sardarji who after hearing me recite some of the verses generally used for 'Ardas' had showered me with blessings

was standing nearby and listening to the conversation. On hearing me say that I was Salim, the old man came and hugged me once again saying, "Kaka, maen taa sochya si vai tu Hindu ya Mauna Sikh hai. Lekin tu mussalmaan ho ke vi enni changi Gurbani jaan da hai, ai vaikh ke hor vi dil khush hoya. Wahe Guru tainu khush rakkhe." Our host deputed by the MI was amused and bewildered, watched the drama but kept quiet. (On reaching the local MI office he told me not to commit the folly of reciting the Gurbani on the other side of the border as that could arouse suspicion in the minds of people with whom I was to interact during my sojourn across the border.)

I told the MI staffer who had come to receive the group that I wanted to visit the Golden Temple before anything else. "Let us first report to the office. Everything else will be discussed only thereafter," he said curtly, dismissing the suggestion signaling us to get into a jeep parked outside the bus stand. The jeep had civil numbers and the person who came to receive us was driving it himself. The office was almost a carbon copy of the Jallandar office down to the smallest details. We were herded in a small room, told to relax for a couple of hours and await further instructions when the office opens and the CO comes. We were allowed to have a small wash or a cup of tea or some light refreshment if we so wished, the staffer told us. "But I want to visit the Golden Temple," I said. "That is not permitted," the staffer replied adding, "instructions to us are that you are to be kept here through, out the day and you will be taken out some time late in the evening towards the border for the launch."

I had already made up my mind that my resolve to visit the Golden temple was not at all negotiable and told the staffer without mincing words that my visit to Harmandir Sahab was a must and I shall go at any cost. "What precisely is your objection to my proposed visit to the temple?" I asked the staffer. "I don't know," he said, "I am only a junior level functionary of the MI and my duty is to simply obey instructions given by the senior officers. These are the instructions to me and I am no body to go into the hows and whys of it," he said wanting to bring the conversation to an abrupt end. "Don't think you are going to close the matter so easily like that," I said with an air of authority to which perhaps the MI staffer was completely unaccustomed. "You may be a small fry in the MI, but I am a

qualified engineer who has joined the agency to become a commissioned officer and I am not in the habit of taking things lying down if I am convinced that there is nothing wrong in what I am demanding. And Mr. So and So – I deliberately used the expression Mr. So and So only to belittle the guy as I was otherwise aware of his name – I am convinced that there is nothing wrong in my asking for a visit to the Har mandir Sahab, you better consult whomsoever you consider to be the senior officer and tell him about my demand. Let that person can come here and give his decision," I said adding, "and I will decide what to do next." The tantrum worked as the fellow went over to the adjacent room and called up his senior on the phone. He returned after a short while and told me that my request had been acceded to but a plainclothes man will accompany me and the others who might want to visit the temple. Hearing this, the faces of Veda and Cheema lit up with joy and they too expressed their desire to come along. A MI staffer in plain clothes accompanied us and the four of us left for the temple in an auto just a little while before sunset.

I had visited the Golden Temple umpteen times since my childhood or, maybe infancy, as my family was deeply devoted to the Gurus and their philosophy of a simple, honest life as the highest form of spiritualism. My mother could go on quoting at random from the 'Sukh Mani Sahab', a longish poem composed by the founder of the Sikh religion Guru Nanak, in the simplest meters called 'doha' and 'asht padi', containing the essence of the Vedas, Upanishads, the Holy Koran and even the Bible. (Due to constraints of space I cannot quote from this beautiful verse, but I suggest the readers go through it to see for themselves what a unique piece of spiritual poetry it is.) My visit to the holiest of the Sikh shrines on that fateful day was different from all the previous ones. My earlier visits were all with my family members and I used to look forward for these visits as good fun. I used to particularly enjoy the 'karah parshad' (sweet pudding offered at all Sikh Shrines anywhere in the world) and 'guru da langar' (the community kitchen run round the clock for feeding the visiting pilgrims where the food though very simple is yet supremely delicious.) The mind used to be relaxed and more so after visiting the shrine because of the spiritual solace that followed after a visit.

But not so that evening when my mind was swollen heavy with a rush of negative

ideas full of pessimism and uncertainty about what lay in store for us after the next couple of hours when I should be launched across the border, where my status would be no different from an illegal immigrant and an enemy agent at that. Occasionally pessimism would give way to feelings of euphoria that I was about to enter into a career that could afford to me the opportunity to do something spectacular for the motherland. In a nutshell, I entered the temple that evening with a somber countenance carrying an old head over young shoulders as it were. After buying some 'karah parshad' from the official sale counter of the shrine for an offering inside, I went over to the 'chhabeel' (the counter where water is offered to the pilgrims round the clock by volunteers as part of the devotional service or 'kar seva') and took almost three bowls full of water. (Water at the chhabeel is offered in traditional bowls called 'katora' and not in glasses; the practice being as old as the shrine itself.)

I stood up near the chhabeel for some time, running my eyes over everything within the range of vision including the 'dukhbhanjani beri', the langar complex and Guru Ramdass sarai. I looked at the birds quietly settling down at the branches of the dukhbhanjani beri and wondered how their behavior was totally different from the birds – or for that matter any other animal else where – as there was no fight amongst them for occupying space on the branches of the beri and each settled peacefully wherever space was available and sat quietly enjoying the melodious sound of the 'shabad kirtan' coming from inside the shrine. It was the magic of the teachings of the Gurus that even the birds' behavior had reformed to such an amazing extent. Partition of India, or at least the violence that coincided with the partition would not have taken place had we the humans learnt a fraction of social harmony practiced by these little creatures. As I am not a politician I won't accuse jinnah or Nehru for the partition of the country. In fact I don't even know who exactly was responsible for the partition but I can say with certainty that whosoever was responsible for that callous folly should have been brought to the dukhbhanjani beri inside the Golden Temple complex and shown how peacefully and decently these little angels have been sharing their space, perched on the branches of the beri generations after generations without any fighting or signs of violence. I am sure the visit could have had a sobering effect on those who

masterminded and mindlessly executed the horrendous carnage and killings on those fateful days when humanity seems to have been administered some exceptionally heavy dose of sleeping pills.

Lost in these thoughts I went inside the sanctum sanctorum, handed over the karah pershad to the sevadar (temple volunteer) for the ceremonial offering and bowed my head in prayers. I must have stood longer than usual as one of the sevadars nudged asking me to move and make way for the others. Veda, Cheema and the MI staffer who accompanied us in plain clothes looked irritated at my lack of time-sense. As we moved out I started walking in the direction of the guru da langar almost instinctively as that had been the practice during all my earlier visits to the shrine with my family. It proved to be the breaking point for the MI staffer who shouted on top of his voice, "Oye khote, hun kitthe chalyan hai iddhar, oye bahr jaanh da rasta oss passay hai." (You donkey, where are you going now; the way to get out of here is on the other side.) ! knew that the poor chap had reason to feel angry as I had spent a long time at almost every stop in the temple, be it the chhabeel or the dukhbhanjani beri or for that matter the sanctum sanctorum. I was aware that losing temper or throwing tantrums would have been an unfair reaction in the given situation and therefore pleaded politely that he permits me to visit the langar hall for just a couple of minutes. He agreed instantly. (One good thing about Army men the world over is that they are never rude to you if you make a request to them politely. They hit the ceiling only if you are rude to them or argue too much. Later when I was captured by the Pakistanis and had to spend some time in Military custody there, I found the same trait amongst the Pakistani army men as well). Once inside the langar hall the MI staffer had turned completely friendly and permitted each one of us to take our own time and enjoy the langar. "Langar chhakkan da maza hi kuchh hor hay pyarayon," (Eating in a langar has its own charm my dears) he said devouring the chapatis called parshada in the langar and enjoying every single bite from every morsel. I had come to the langar hall only because of nostalgia and an unknown fear that I might not be able to come again if something untoward happens during my sojourn across the boarder.

As we returned to the office, a group of 3 – 4 MI insiders were already waiting

for us. At least one of them appeared to be an officer as I could make out from his personality and deportment. The three of us (Veda, Cheema and myself) were addressed in a stern, no nonsense style by the officer for about half an hour in chaste Punjabi. The staffers chipped in every now and then with brief "yas sar" or simply "haan jee ssar". "Look mundiyon (boys)", the officer started, "You are going to be part of a prestigious branch of a prestigious organization. The job you are going to enter upon will make you part of the folklore in this country, your deeds will form part of history that will be taught to your children and their children's children and your name shall figure prominently in the books that might be written after some years by professors and scholars. Not many people in this country or in any other country are lucky to be associated with such a career and profession. This is the brighter side of your job. But there is a darker side also and that is that it has risks like no other job. You have been given elaborate security briefings during your training in Jallandar. You have also been given sufficient practical training to cope with all kinds of situations and you have to remember each and every alphabet of those lessons if life is dear to you. My duty is only to repeat whatever lessons you have been given as part of your training and also to teach you some survival strategies in case you have to face a situation not covered by your training lessons. I will also tell you about the SOP for this mission for your group."

He gave us a dry run of situations if we were captured or if we suspected that some one was suspecting us, and so on. His parting advice was, "Mundiyon je tussi phade jawo taa ik gall da dhyan rakhna; na ta kissenu apna asli naaun dassna or na hi ik lafaz MI apni jubaan utte aan dena. Pahli gall taa ai vai ki tussi inne trained bande ho ke kade phade jaogai hi nahi. Lekin je phade gaye te MI twahdi har kissam di madad karugi. Twahde family nu tankhwah bhejegi te oss paar vakil vagairah karke twahdi madad karugi. Lekin haan ai yaad rakhna ke agar phade jaan de vaad tussi apna asli naaun das ditta ya MI lafaz apni zabaan taun kadh ditta te pher assi twahdi koi madad nahin karani. Assi kahdeyangay ki saanu nahin pata ai banda kaun hai; Ai jarur koi Pakistani hai jinnu pakistandi MI ne sadde khilaaf padhaya hai. Dhyaan rakhna mundiyaun ahoji haalat vich utthai twahnu Pakistaniyaan nai kutnaa hai aur edhar twahde parvaar nu assi ik

dhela nahin dena." (Boys! Keep one thing in mind if you are captured neither tell any one your real identity nor let the word MI show up on your tongue. Firstly we have trained you so well that there is no question of your being captured; even if you are captured, the MI will take full care of you and your families. We shall pass on your monthly salary to your family here in India and will also arrange for good legal help to you in Pakistan. But if you disclose your true name or if you utter the word MI before your interrogators, remember that we shall completely disown you by saying that you must be a Pakistani and the Pakistani establishment might be planting stories about your Indian connections only to discredit India). The officer then went on to give an example, " Jivain faraz karo Kishori da naanv hunn Salim hai. Je ta Kishori ess naaun Salim te kayam rahya assi ohdi har kisam di madad karangay lekin je onne das ditta ke mera naanv kishori hai Salim nahin te uss de vaad sadde kolaun kise kisam di madad di ummid na karay". (For example we have given the name Salim to Kishori; now as long as Kishori sticks to this name Salim we shall give every possible help to him and his family, but if he breaks down and says no I am not Salim, I am Kishori then in that case he should not expect any support from us for himself or for his family).

After I was captured I realized that the Pakistanis were a step ahead of our MI in this ditching game. When under immense torture and psychological pressure I told them that my real name was Kishori they gave me the name Amriksingh as they were under professional compulsions to hoist some unsolved cases under their Official Secrets Act by forcing a non-existent identity on me. So inhuman, barbaric and intense was the torture inflicted on me that through out my incarceration in the Pakistani jails I continued to call myself Amriksingh. The jinx was broken only after we were rescued to be freed under the aegis of the ICRC to whom I narrated my story and my real name Kishorilall based on which they verified my nationality and I was released. (When I now read about the confusion involving Amarjit Singh alias Manjit Singh who has been sentenced to death by hanging in Pakistan I can imagine his plight as it is a repeat of my own story as the Pakistani establishment might be trying to hoist their otherwise unsolved case of the Lahore grenade attack on this poor man).

After giving details of the mission requirement and SOP for the mission the officer

concluded by declaring that Kishori shall be the leader of the group and Veda its local guide. A typed paper containing the mission requirement was given to me and I was told to go through it and destroy the paper there and then. Of course before destroying the paper I was supposed to memorise and orally repeat its contents to make sure that I understood what was expected of the mission. The officer told me that destroying the paper was crucial as its presence could form an incriminating piece of evidence against me in the event of my being captured. The officer gave me the impression that his sole concern in giving the advice was that I could be in trouble if the paper was to be recovered but I subsequently realized that destruction of the paper was also essential for the MI's own interests as its presence could be evidence that I was working for them when they disowned me. The intention became crystal clear when long afterwards I realized in hind sight that the officer asked me to write its contents in an abbreviated form in my own hand on another piece of paper if I was unsure of my memory. The officer must have known for sure that my troubles could not be any less if the paper written in my own hand was recovered by my captors in Pakistan.

8

Mission 1, 2 And 3.....

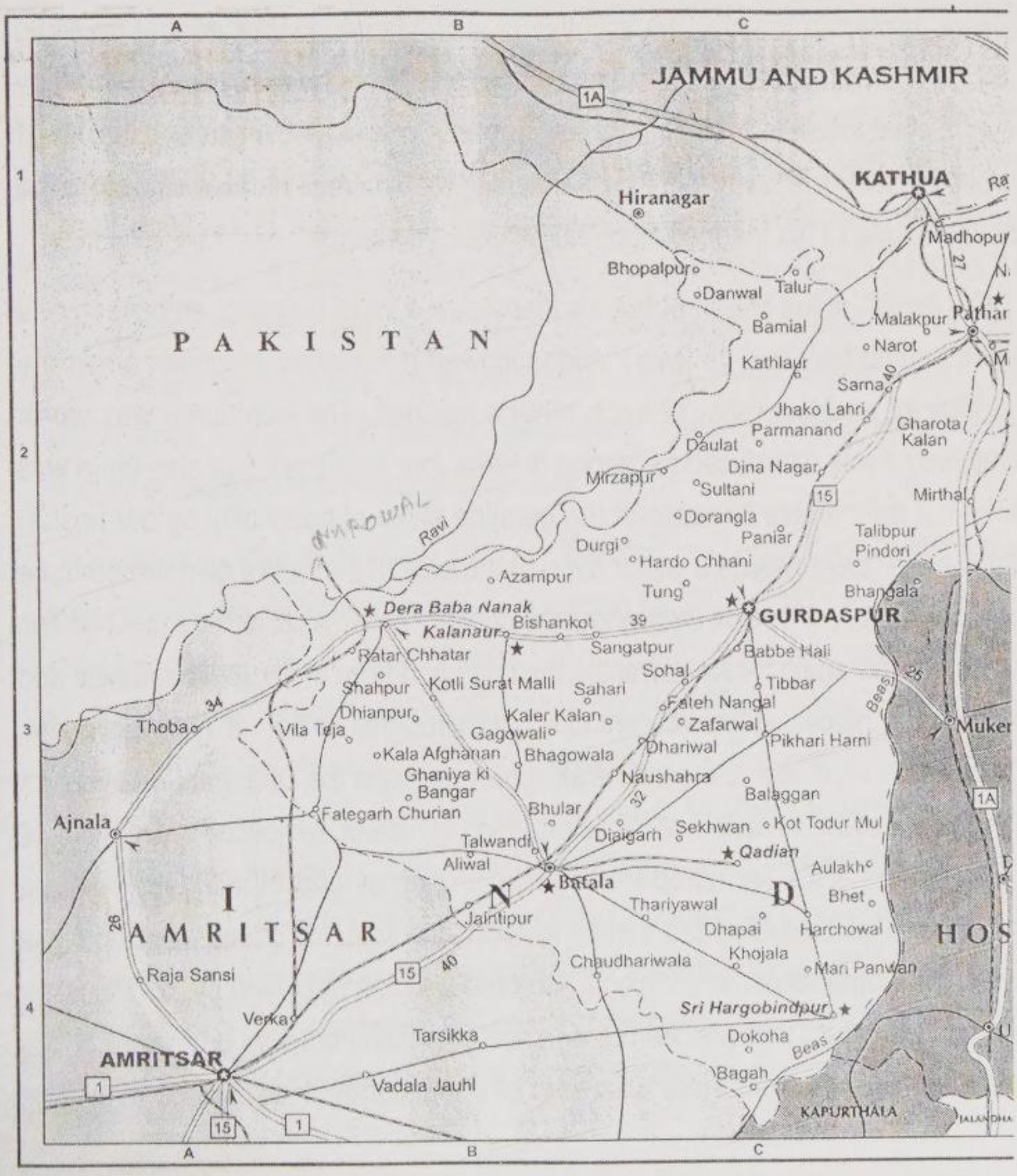
After briefing, the officer shook hands with each of us wishing us all the best for the mission and took leave. We were told to have our meals and think of nothing but the mission ahead. The staffer who had come to pick us up from the bus stand in the morning was to drive us towards the border a little past midnight and thereafter it was Veda's job to guide us inside Pakistan. I was still going through mixed feelings of anxiety and excitement but Veda and Cheema were quite normal. Veda tried to put me at ease by saying that he has been going across the border quite often and there was no difference whatsoever between the two sides. "Ekko boli, ekko khaana peena ekkohije kapde latte aur ekkoije loki; mainu tai ajj tak ai gal nahin samajh aayi Kishori ke dowan mulkan wich farak ki hai," he said visibly amused. (Same language, same food and dress habits and same people; Kishori dear I have not been able to understand till today what is the difference between the two countries). "I have got good friends on the other side" Veda added and clarified, "the MI fellows call my friends their source." I don't know what a source is but I do know that the chaps are as lovable as mine or your friends or relatives over here and they are all as nostalgic about their early years in India as some of our own relatives are about their native places left behind in what is today Pakistan. "Take it easy Kishori," Veda added patronizingly, "once you are there you will see That Pakistan is no foreign country for Indians, particularly for us Punjabis. In fact it is no different than any other place on our side of the Punjab. After a couple of visits you will see for yourself that Kasoor, Sialkot or Narowal are in no way different from Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur or for that matter your very own Nandachur." Veda paused for a while and added, "but Kishori, I can't say the same thing about Lahore as that is a city without any equal. Even before partition we Punjabis used to say that so long as a person has not visited

Lahore he cannot claim to have been born in this world." Veda suddenly became so sentimental about Lahore and its beauty that he felt sorry for me as Lahore was not included in the operational itinerary of our mission.

Around midnight we were told to get into the waiting jeep to be taken to the border for the launch. After about an hour's drive we reached the border point known as the 'Basantaar Picket.' After hurriedly dropping us near the picket the jeep drove back fast and vanished from sight. It was quiet at the picket. (Those were different times when the border was manned by nothing more than small pickets of the Punjab Armed Police (PAP) and border fencing was an unheard word. With electric swiftness Veda got into charge and asked us to quickly follow him and cross the Basantaar Nallah, a ditch cum bund feature (called DCB in the Army lingo) perhaps reinforced by the PAP for security reasons. Just as we crossed the nallah and reached the other side, Veda came near me and whispered with extraordinary tenderness in my ear, "kaka assi Pakistan wich haan." (Young man we are now inside Pakistan). I felt rather excited with a feeling of achievement that I was in a foreign country without any Pass Port, Visa or immigration formalities. I also thought it strange that the so called foreign country appeared in no way different from our own. What is the reason that this is called a foreign country when there seemed nothing foreign about it, I wondered. The distant sound of dogs barking on the periphery of the nearby villages interspersed with the rustic dialect of the Punjabi farmers coming from distant settlements of farm hands commonly called 'Pind' on either side of the border was all too very familiar.

As we were walking down guided by Veda, we came across peasants moving from some nearby pind to their own herding some half a dozen hefty looking buffaloes prodding them with choicest abuses common to Punjabi language spoken anywhere in the world including in this so called foreign country. A well-built elderly farmer who on seeing us slowed down a bit and gave us a hard stare led the group. Veda swiftly seized the moment and after a quick 'salamwalequm' (Muslim way of greeting) started admiring the robust health of the buffaloes and the 'chowdhry sahab' alternatively. He followed his monologue with a quick spree of names dropping involving some of the most prominent landlords of the nearby villages. I instantly understood why the MI had made him our local guide for the

mission. His knowledge of the nearby villages and the prominent citizenry of the area seemed astounding. The farmer (whom Veda had addressed as chowdhary sahib) was visibly bowled over by Veda's acquaintance with the bigwigs of the area and also by the immense respect shown to him by Veda by addressing him as chowdhary sahib and continuing equally respectfully throughout the conversation. (Veda subsequently confided in me that on seeing the man herding buffaloes at that unearthly hour he knew instantaneously that he could not be anything more than a farm hand earning a daily wage and decided to address him as chowdhary sahib as that would simply dazzle him with joy because of which nothing but admiration for 'the well mannered stranger' would enter his head). The farm hand extended an instant invitation for a glass of lassi and rest for the night that



was politely turned down by Veda with gratitude on the plea that we had to catch the first available train to Sialkot due to some urgent family affairs that could not be disclosed in public for obvious reasons. The two groups led by Veda and the farmhand resumed their journey in opposite directions after a quick 'Allah Hafiz,' the muslims' way of saying bye – bye, literally meaning, "may God protect you."

We walked down to Narowal (Also called Narrow Wall) Railway Station to be just in time to catch the train to Sialkot. In the train Veda didn't want to give a chance to any of the co-passengers to take the initiative in starting a conversation and whenever he anticipated that any one was itching to talk he would himself seize the initiative and start talking. (Veda once confided to me that in the company of strangers the one who initiates the conversation also controls its direction. He always preferred to seize the initiative in such circumstances so that he could decide what all was to be the subject of the talks. If on the contrary the other guy was the first to talk then he could possibly touch upon something talking that could prove a costly give away for us). On reaching Sialkot Veda headed straight to the house of one of his friends whom the MI called a 'source'.

Our arrival at the house of Veda's friend saw a lot of hugging, embracing and back patting between the two friends followed by detailed enquiries about the welfare of each member of each other's families. The bonhomie was worth watching. I was introduced as 'appna hi kaka' (our own boy). Our stay there was brief but memorable because of the genuine show of hospitality by our host. (I think hospitality towards a visitor even at the cost of the host's own discomfiture is a common social value throughout the subcontinent). After a day's rest with the family we left again for Narrowal the next day and from there, to Chandowal and some other places which we were to scout thoroughly as part of the assignment. This area is very near to the Indo-Pak border opposite the Chhamb-Jorian sector on our side of the Radcliff line. While returning to Sialkot we noticed the movement of tanks and APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) as part of a convoy of some unit of the Pakistan Army but without its formation sign. My guess was that these were the elements of the additional Armored Division deployed by the Pakistani Army during the 1965 war. As our defence establishment was not aware of this additional deployment there was a lot of confusion and also some avoidable

damage because of it during the operations. Our MI and MO were aware of only one division (i.e. the Bahawalpur Division) operating in the sector. (After I completed the script of this book General Parvez Musharraf's autobiography, 'In the Line of Five' has been published. What the General has written in Chapter 7 -page 45 - of the book seems to vindicate my assumption). After spending some more time we returned to India from the same route from which we had entered Pakistan and submitted our report to CO saab. As he was going through the report, I could make out from his facial expressions that he was feeling happy and satisfied, if not jubilant at the work done by us.

I was expecting a loud applause and a pat on the back from him but his reaction was only marginally better than being cold and indifferent. When I asked for his reaction to our guess about the presence of the additional division in the sector he went to the extent of snubbing me on the ground that I had to learn to submit the report and forget about it as analysis and evaluation of the reports submitted by the operatives was the prerogative of senior officers. I subsequently learnt from ustadji that the Col. had actually touted my report as one of his most spectacular achievements and also succeeded in scoring some brownie points from Brig Lall. It pained me then but as of now I know with first hand experience that such perjuries are common not only in the MI but also in many other agencies doing similar work. The term IPR (intellectual property rights) is unknown and unheard of in most departments of the government.

It was some time in the beginning of 1966 that my second assignment came through. Col. Bhatti introduced me to a certain Mr. Gulzar Masih Malik who was to be my guide during the trip. The task given this time was more specific. I was to visit a location where I could actually see the functioning of the T-54 Tanks and collect as many details about its strong and weak points as possible. In fact this was the assignment hinted to me in the very beginning by Bhimsen when he told me that the MI was looking for some one having thorough knowledge of automobiles who could cross over to Pakistan and confirm reports of its malfunctioning. Going by the details some operatives had submitted to the MI earlier I had guessed that the tank had a faulty gearbox. We crossed the border, did our job and returned from the same route from which we had gone for the first assignment. In situations

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PAKISTAN
Dera Baba Nanak
GURDASPUR
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Ghonewala
Ram Das
Thoba
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Balharwal
Sarangdeo
Gaggo Mahl
Jafar Kot
Jasraur
Chamiari
Fategarh Churian
Ghuinan Chhina
15
Ajnala
Vachhoa
Bhindi Aulakh
Bhander Kalan
Talwandi
Kartal
Bohlian
Vadala Viram
Bhangali Kalan
Batala
Mudh
Sodhion
Dharmkot
Kotla Gujran
Shamnagar
Bhilowal
Bagga Kalan
Sangatpura
Bhanguan
Jagdeo Kalan
Lopoke
Bhittewadh
Harseli Chhina
Uddhoke
Wariam Nangal
Majitha
Chaudhriwala
Raja Sansi
Nag Kalan
Mattewal
Man
Rantan
Chuganwan
Ram Tirth
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Mnankot Kalan
Jethuwal
Arjan Manga
Bachlwind
Verka
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Dhanaya Kalan
Choganwan
Uddho Nagal
AMRITSAR
Nawanpind
Dhardeo
Khasa
Rangarh
Mananwala
Vadala Jauhal
Dherwala
Gaggarbhana
Wagah
Atari
Bhagtanwala
Bhangwan
Khilchian
Vadala
Sathiala
Gurusar Sutlani
Chneharta
Jandiala
Tangra
Baba Bakala
Gilwali
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Butari
Bhakna Kalan
Jandiala Guru
Dera Baba Jaimal Singh
Sangna
Chabba
Chhajalwaddi
Rajatal
Bundala
Janian
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Raya Kalan
Beas R.S.
Sarai Amanat Khan
Kasel
Pindori Ransingh
Gohlwar Varpal
Pakhoke
Beas
Chabal Kalan
Bhuchar Kalan
Tharu
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Gaggobua
Bath
Jalalabad
Nuruddin
Tarn Taran
Naurangabad
Khadur Sahib
Kanjli
Palasaur
Sur Singh
Kiri Shahi
Dhotian
Khalra
Chotala
Rasulpur
Bharowal
KAPURTHALA
Shahbazpur
Panwan
Fatehbad
Goyindwal
Pahuwind
Bhikkiwind
Naushahra
Mari Kamboke
Kairon
Lauhka
Ghurkwind
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Jamera
Barhampur
Wan
Taiwandi Chaudhrian
Kachcha Pakka
Basarke
Chung
Sirahali Kalan
Munda
Patti
Rajoke
Chuslewar
Chohla
Pajian
Lakhna
Bopa Rai
Bhagupur
Khara
Gharke
Beas
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Gharyala
Gandiwind
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Valtoha
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I N D I A

like this if one crosses the border and returns unnoticed by those whose duty it is to notice such movements, the entire mission may be called uneventful. Our first crossing was eventful to some extent because of the group of villagers near Narrowal who came across and asked us who we were and where were we headed for at that unearthly hour. Our second crossing was completely uneventful in the absence of even such random, inconsequential encounters with the locals. But the same thing cannot be said about our third crossing over as during our return journey we were intercepted not by the Pakistanis but our very own jawans of the PAP manning the border picket.

The third assignment was also as clear, and precise as the second one but somewhat more arduous and perhaps also more important than the previous two. We were to scout the Kasoor sector and find the precise location of their long range gun code named 'Rani.' The Pakistanis in the Sialkot sector had earlier tested a similar gun named 'Sherni.' Our assignment was to find the precise location of the gun and as many details about it as possible. Gulzar Masih was to be my guide once again and we crossed over to Pakistan from the Khalra sector. We kept on scouting the area extensively but found no clue whatsoever of 'Rani.' Gulzar's knowledge of the area was as remarkable as Veda's was in the Narrowal sector and like Veda he too had some local contacts who were reliable and trustworthy. They would protect our identity even at the cost of their own lives and honor. I asked one of the contacts if he could guide me to the shrine of Baba Bulleshah in Kasoor and our host agreed readily and happily. Gulzar had his own reservations about my proposed visit to the shrine due to security considerations but I convinced him that the over all balance lies in favor of the proposed visit. "I have heard a lot about the Sufi saint from my mother and my heart doesn't permit me to leave Kasoor without paying a visit at his shrine," I told Gulzar and started reciting some of the finest verses composed by the saint explaining their meaning at the same time to him.

Gulzar was a simple man who could be called only semi literate in the conventional sense but he was an excellent human being, highly evolved spiritually and morally. During my long association with Gulzar I never found him having done or said anything that even remotely could be construed as unfair or unjust.

I recited to him one of the better-known compositions of Bullahshah, "Ik Nukte wich gal mukdi hai" and explained the meaning of each line adding finally that in him I could see a live example of the philosophy enunciated by the saint in this particular composition. "Aren't you practicing what the saint has said in the lines, "Aiven mattha zameen ghisaida, paa lamma mahraab dikhaai da; padh qalma lok hassai da, dil andar samajh na laai da" (In vain forehead is rubbed on earth, And forehead sign they show for mirth; Godly words are uttered for fun which can never heart enliven") Gulzar blushed saying, "Kishori tu vadda shedaai hai," (Kishori you are too smart) and agreed to not just let me go to the shrine but also accompany me. Whether his decision to accompany me was out of concern for my safety or out of respect for the sufi saint was not clear to me. When I told Gulzar that I wished to pray to the saint for the success of our mission, he gave me a mild rebuff in style typical of him saying, "Kishori, why do you draw such a great saint into our murky, mundane business?" I wonder if there could be any other human being as upright as Gulzar. I could also guess that his association with an organization as murky and mundane as the MI, could be only as a result of some insurmountable compulsions even though I have not been able to figure out till this day what precisely those compulsions could be.

Our visit to the shrine was so memorable that it is still fresh in my mind even after four decades. The building was simple and full of peace. At the centre was the 'Mazaar' (mausoleum) of the saint covered with a green velvet sheet with intricate work done in silver thread, known in the subcontinent as 'Zaridozi'. In the open courtyard the quwwals (traditional singers of the sufi music) were singing some popular compositions of the saint, as if in a trance. The air was thick with fragrance of 'lohbaan' (traditional incense typical of the orient, particularly used at sufi shrines as offering to the saints) and 'agarbattis' (incense sticks). The over all effect of the lohbaan, the agarbattis and the reverberation of quwwalis was sufficient to transport any one instantly into a trance and I or my friend Gulzar could be no exception. For a while we were completely lost in the melody of the quwwalis and the hypnotizing effect of the fragrance of incense sticks.

I kind of suddenly woke up from the trance on hearing the particular composition that the quwwals were singing at the time. "Meri Bukkal de wich chor ni meri bukkal

de wich chor", the quwwals were singing repeatedly emphasizing the word 'chor' or thief. (It is one of the most popular compositions of the sufi saint that literally means, "there is a thief hiding right in the veil with which I am covering my body." This is only the literal meaning but its real meaning has to be understood in its mystical and spiritual connotations which signify how an individual is often brought to naught by the evils which remain hidden within his own mind). Realising that I was in a foreign country having entered it surreptitiously for an objective that could be called theft of the worst order, I felt nervous and completely out of wits. Is it some divine inspiration because of which the quwwals started singing this particular composition the moment Gulzar and I entered the shrine? What if the divine inspiration also leads some one amongst the devotees present to me and Gulzar and we are caught? I started feeling giddy because of nervousness and sat down pressing my forehead tightly with both my hands. Suddenly there was a commotion and people from all directions started converging towards me and shouting in chorus, "ki hoya kake nu"? (What has happened to this young man). Before I could react, our local host was in charge. "Nothing" he said, "he is one of my relatives who insisted on coming on foot from his village to pay respect to the saint and it must be the fatigue. All of you just move away and let him breathe some fresh air; everything will be alright." Everyone started moving away. Our host brought some water and asked me to take some sips.

Soon, the 'khadim' (literally meaning the attendant but actually the person who acts as priest at the sufi shrines) was seen approaching carrying a neatly made bunch of peacock feathers bundled together in the fashion of a broom in hand, walking with visible grace and elegance. He looked straight into my eyes making me once again nervous with the hallucinations that the priest has after all been provided divine guidance that I am an Indian spy masquerading as a local youth. I started imagining that it was only a matter of time before the holy man simply catches me by the scruff of my neck and makes me over to the local police. My fears were to be proved wrong sooner than I could imagine. The Khadim waved the peacock feathers a couple of times in front of my face in a ritualistic manner, put his hand tenderly on my head in a gesture of showering blessings and muttered, "Ya Allah! Apne nabi de sadque wich ess bachche nu hayati baksh." (O God! For

the sake of your prophet's joy, bless this child with long life).

The khadim who had started walking back to his seat near the shrine, suddenly turned back, took me aside and said, "kaka mae nain janada tu kon ve, kitthoun aayaa ve te aeththe Kasoor vich ki karda paya ve; o sab ta tu jaane; lekin kaka mainu ai disda ke kuchch dinaan de vaad tere utte koi bahot vaddi musibat aan vaali hai; bas tu ghabravin na, te babe nu hamesha yaad rakhin; baba tainu sab musibtan taun bachayega." (Young man I don't know who you are, from where you have come and what exactly is your business to be here; but I can see that very shortly you are going to face a major crisis. Remember one thing, how so ever serious the crisis, this great sufi saint shall provide you protection; so young man! never get nervous and never forget the mercies of Baba Bullah Shah, the great sufi saint). The khadim asked me to follow him to the shrine, picked up a few rose petals placed by the devotees as offering on the velvet sheet covering the mazaar and handed those to me. "Keep it with you as a mark of the Baba's grace and pray to him whenever you are in crisis; He shall come to your rescue. (I always kept the rose petals with me and throughout my days of incarceration in Pakistani jails I could experience how miraculously it saved me bringing me back from the brink on a number of occasions).

As we were walking back from the shrine, Gulzar suddenly burst into laughter. I couldn't understand the reason and asked him what was the matter. "You have seen Kishori the consequences of trying to draw a saintly soul into our murky, mundane affairs." I still didn't understand and asked Gulzar to elaborate. "See", Gulzar continued, "you had the hallucinations about Baba Bullah Shah's divine inspiration guiding the quwwals and the Khadim about your true identity because you believed that the saint's holy spirit could participate in worldly matters and influence the course of their events. You would not have had such hallucinations had you firmly believed that such great saints are not meant for petty things like giving you some clue about 'Rani' or for that matter giving clues to the Khadim or the pilgrims about your identity. So you see Kishori, not dragging the spiritual into the mundane is not just a moral obligation for us it is also a practical requirement." I once again bowed my head to the extraordinary brilliance of Gulzar who as I stated earlier was only a semi literate person in the conventional sense of the term.

Gulzar and myself spent better part of the night going over maps of the area that we were to scout in search of 'Rani' who was being persistently elusive. We zeroed in on a sector that I thought had not been thoroughly scanned by us during the last couple of days. In spite of Gulzar's sermons against mixing up the mundane and the spiritual I couldn't help praying almost instinctively to Baba Bullah Shah for the success of our mission. The prayer was answered at least partly when the next day we started our search in the area decided upon last night after studying the maps. After loitering around for some time we found ourselves almost face to face with 'Rani'. It was placed in a highly fortified area that simply couldn't be penetrated. Thus, while we could not collect any technical details about 'Rani' we were in a position to vouch for its location with certainty. The area was lashed with incessant rains for the last couple of days because of which our chances of remaining outdoors were not very bright and in any case we couldn't move around in heavy rains without arousing suspicion about our movements at least amongst some of the onlookers who could even be personnel of the Pakistani MI because of the positioning of the gun in the vicinity. The mission was atleast partially accomplished. We therefore decided to return to HQs and submit report of whatever we had achieved.

Those were different days when real time or even quick time communication with HQs was impossible as the STD was rare, mobile phones unheard of and the ubiquitous www and its offshoot the e-mail simply unimaginable. The disadvantages of the crippling lack of means of communications especially for the community of spies were obvious and could at times prove fatal for the spy or his mission. It however had one advantage, as HQs could not be contacted for every small matter, the operatives in the field had relatively more freedom to take decisions on the spot as compared to their counterparts today. In the present context we might have been required to email to the HQ that we intended to leave with the mission only half accomplished, because of heavy rains and the consequent lack of mobility for outdoor observation and wait for the HQs' response to our email. Back in 1965 – 66 we had the liberty of taking these small decisions entirely on our own and we – Gulzar and myself – did take the decision to call it a day and return with whatever we had been able to achieve.

We decided to return the same night from the Khalra sector from which we had entered Pakistan and it is at the PAP border picket at Khalra that real action awaited us. Like the communications scenario, the border scenario too was entirely different in those days. It was a relatively softer border with only a small group of the PAP manning the posts (called the border picket) and no fencing at all. The PAP personnel took their job easy and they generally went about their business of eating, drinking and sleeping as normally as any normal Punjabi would. By convention 1 or 2 Jawans of the picket were assigned the guard duty at night and even they would not remain outdoors if it rained or was too cold. The position on the Paskistani side was no different. Our Pakistani brethren manning their side of the border too went about their lives in an equally normal manner including not getting drenched by rain or bitten by cold by remaining outdoors when the night was too wintery or too rainy. After all we were brothers coming of the same family and neither could dare depart from the hoary traditions of the family just because a British gentleman by name Mr. (or was he Sir) Radcliff drew a line on a map and declared us separate. These common traits of the two sides based on our shared past were a boon to spies like me from either side of the border.

As part of our training we used to be told to select a rainy or a wintery night for crossing over. "Firstly you won't be caught as none of the PAP chaps remains outdoors when it is raining or is too cold," Ustadji had told us during the training sessions, "and if you are caught on the Indian side, just tell them you are from the Army and not a Pakistani, but never ever say that you are from MI. If you utter the word MI we shall take no responsibility even if the PAP personnel shoot you and throw your bodies back inside Pakistan." We were also told the names of some Army personnel; mostly JCOs that we could refer to in case we were intercepted or captured on the Indian side. There were different names given for different sectors. "Just ask the PAP fellows to inform the persons whose names you have been told and no one will dare touch you. "The concerned Army personnel will come and get you released", we had been told. "And Ustadji what should we do if captured on the Pakistani side", I had once light heartedly asked during our training to which Ustadji had replied equally light heartedly, "in that case tussi apna khyal rakhna te assi twahde vaste unit Gurdware wich ardass karaangay."

(In that case take care and we shall pray for you in the unit Gurudwara).

It was raining heavily on the night we decided to cross over and return to India. We had selected Khalra sector for our return crossing as we had already seen it at the time of our inbound journey to Pakistan a couple of days before. At the border our Pakistani brethren were upholding the tradition as not a single soul was seen outdoors and we could practically walk past the post without any let or hindrance. We were quietly and rather comfortably crossing the no man's land (the distance that separates the check posts of the two sides) when a shadow pacing up and down the zero line on the Indian side came to our notice. It seemed that the shadow had stopped qnd fixed full attention on us. Our position was precarious. We were sure to be caught by this moving shadow who we knew by now, was a PAP jawan having for some reason decided to break the tradition of sleeping or at least remaining indoors when it was raining so heavily. The only option available was to walk back to the Pakistani side but that could prove to be doubly risky. The PAP jawan having sited us was not going to let us walk back peacefully. He could open fire or raise an alarm thereby leading to some kind of a commotion and alert in the Pakistani picket. Even if that didn't happen, where was the guarantee that another brother on the Pakistani side would not similarly break the tradition and decide to take a stroll outside his tent? We found ourselves in one of those unenviable positions when a decision had to be taken in a split second after considering all the pros and cons faster than the speed of light. The decision was taken. We shall walk over to our own side and give reference of the names of the JCOs we had been told by Ustadji for this kind of an eventuality. We may suffer some torture for the night till our savior arrives at the scene but we shall not be killed. If we walk back to the Pakistani side overwhelming probability was that we could be killed. Worse still the identity of our local contacts could be compromised and they could be exposed to incalculable risks. These persons had protected us by taking grave risks and now it was our turn to prove our concern for their safety and well being.

As we continued to walk towards the PAP picket, the jawan who had by now started briskly pacing up and down paused for a moment and shouted, "Kon hai oye bhen****". "Sardarji galaan na kaddo, assi twahde prah haan," (Sardarji please

don't use four letter words; we are your own brethren), I said in a hushed voice worried that any raising of voice by either side could start a commotion leading to firing from both the pickets. It had the desired impact as the PAP jawan simply commanded "hands up" without raising his voice and pointed his gun at us. We raised our hands and started walking slowly when he gave another command to "crawl". We quickly threw ourselves on the ground and started crawling. The PAP jawan had meanwhile called out some of his colleagues and before we realized that we had set our feet on Indian soil we found ourselves surrounded by some half a dozen hefty, well built jawans of the PAP busy tying our hands and feet to render us completely immobile.

As operation tie down was in progress one of the jawans who appeared to be senior to the others started showering choicest abuses and shouting on top of his voice, "Oye kitthun aaye ho oye katwe madar****, kaun ho tussi kanjaryon." (From where you have come you circumcised rascals and what are your intentions). "Sardarji mai twahnu dasya na assi twahe apne phra haan," I said. "Mahraj assi bhi Indian haan", Gulzar added in one breath as quickly as he could (Sardarji didn't I tell you we are your own brethren, we are Indians). "Oye saare katwe apne aap nu Indian hi kainde nai," (All circumcised rascals who sneak in from here call themselves Indians only), said one jawan initiating a long session of acrimonious arguments during which we had to face a rapid fire session of questions after questions shot at us by each and every man in the picket. "If you are Indians what the hell are you doing here at the dead of night," said one; "why the hell should an Indian be walking like a thief towards India from Pakistan side at the dead of night when it is raining cats and dogs," butted in the others. "You would have simply sneaked inside India had I not been outside contrary to your expectations because of the rains," screamed the jawan who was the first to have spotted us walking towards the picket.

As the argument turned loud and vociferous, the picket commander came out of the tent rubbing his eyes to ward off sleepiness. Seeing him or rather smelling him as he approached in closer proximity we could make out that he had had a little more than his share of booze before retiring for the night. To begin with he quite surprisingly admonished his own men shouting, "oye ki hai oye kyaun rola

paa rahe ho kanjaryon." (What's the matter? why this ruckus you gypsies?) The jawan whom we had seen out doors first of all responded ahead of the others perhaps to impress his boss with his devotion to duty. "Zenab meh bars rahya si lekin maen bahar apni duty karda paya si; wekhda ki haan kea e donon katwe oss passai taun picket wull turi arahai hain. Maen jaduaun enna nun challenge kitta tae kainde nae vai assi Indian haan." (Sir I was standing guard outside inspite of the heavy rains and what I saw is that these two chaps were walking from the other side towards our picket. When I challenged them they started claiming that they are Indians). "Are you Indians or bhen**** Pakistanis?" The commander asked with a menacing show of authority. "We are Indians" Gulzar and I shot back quickly. The commander asked our name, father's name and address in India. This proved somewhat tricky, as according to our training and instructions we were not supposed to give away our true identity in a situation like this. "We are army personnel so please behave properly and call Subedar so and so of so and so regiment," I said trying to show off self confidence. The commander was not impressed and wondered what could be the problem in telling our names and addresses even if we were army men.

Suddenly the commander got an idea and shouted, "oye apni paintaan thalle karo, maen hunai vekh lenna haan tussi ki ho." (Lower your pants and let me see for myself who exactly you are). Gulzar could guess it as clearly as I had that the commander who was still under the influence of liquor perhaps wanted to see whether or not we bore marks of circumcision. On seeing us hesitant, he ordered his men, "ennan di paintan laa devo." (Take off their pants). The orders were executed with lightning speed and before we could realize what was happening we found the commander and some of his men focusing torch light at our private parts somewhat vulgarly and declaring that we were sure Pakistani spies. The experience I had during training when I was abused and bashed up by PAP jawans in retaliation for their friends and relatives killed during the partition flashed in my mind and I firmly told the commander that he may have to face the consequences for assaulting an Army man. I once again requested him to contact the JCO I had referred to earlier before proceeding any further in the matter. I couldn't tell him the deceit by which the surgeon at the Military Hospital in Jalandhar Cantt had

circumcvised me but asked him why it was necessary that every person who has circumcision should be a Muslim and more importantly, why is it not possible for a Muslim to be an Indian or even an Army man in India.

The commander had by now mellowed down considerably as much because of my reference to the JCO as because of the waning effect of the booze on his mind. He agreed that even a muslim could be an Indian or an Indian Army man but what he thought was yet to be explained by me to his satisfaction was why should I be walking surreptitiously at the dead of a rainy night from the Pakistani side towards his picket. The reference to the JCO's name by me seemed to have made him helpless, as he couldn't bash us up in spite of the fact that we were still suspects in his eyes. He found a via media to strike a balance between the call of his duty to not touch us until the arrival of the JCO and his carnal desire to torture us by ordering his men to tie us to the trees outside the picket notwithstanding the heavy rain that was still continuing unabated. Our ordeal finally ended when at the break of dawn Havaldar Suchcha Singh appeared on the scene and secured our release from the picket.

We submitted our report and it made Col. Bhatti visibly happy and I guessed that the MI was actually keener to ascertain the location of Rani than its technical details. We were told to be ready for the next assignment that was to be given in 2-3days' time and were instructed to remain inside the office in the intervening period. I wanted to visit my home but was not allowed due to 'operational reasons.' After a day or two Col. Bhatti introduced a gentleman named Lahora Singh alias Pishora Singh and told that he will be our teammate in the next assignment. Gulzar Masih was also to be a part of the team but not the guide as the task of guide had been assigned to Pishora. The task given this time was more elaborate than the previous ones. We were to check the location of the building housing a particular armored unit and the details of transport as well as combat vehicles used by it in addition to the location of an infantry division in the Kasoor – Lahore sector and the location of pill boxes and other fortifications along the border. Most important part of the task was to get the details of the unit or units located at 'Mian Meer' in Lahore Cantonment.

In spite of the bitter experiences of the previous assignment I felt excited about a visit to Lahore, the city that was no less than London, Paris, Rome or Venice to all Punjabis of at least up to my generation. Before the partition of India a visit to Lahore for a Punjabi was something to boast of and if you had not visited the city no one could fault you for suffering from insurmountable inferiority complex. "Jinne nahin vekhya Lahore au jamya hi nahin" and "Uchcha buraz lahorda" were popular Punjabi folksongs that had transformed into folklore over the years.

On 14th September 1966 Cheema drove us in a jeep and dropped us at 'Wan -Khalra' sector on our side of the border late in the night. From there Pishora guided us to the point from where crossing was to be done. It was raining heavily and Pishora wanted to utilize the anticipated absence of the guards on either side because of the rains. While we followed Pishora, he followed his instincts and we succeeded in crossing over to Pakistan without much of problem or even effort. We walked some distance in the fields that had no sign oh human presence perhaps due to the heavy rains that lashed the area through out the night. A shortwhile before the crack of dawn Pishora told us to change our wet clothes. Pishora seemed to know every inch of the sector like the back of his palm. He guided us to narrow winding paths through the fields and after a short while we found ourselves bang on the Kasoor – Lahore Road. Seeing a bus going in the direction of Lahore I was about to wave my hand to request the driver to stop and take us along but was forbidden by Pishora as he wanted to walk down to the nearest village. His logic was simple. If you board the bus along with other passengers from a regular stop you draw less attention than if you do so by stopping the bus in jungle where you are the only one getting in. We therefore walked upto the nearest village and waited for the bus that was to take us to the historical city of Lahore, the epitome of all that was grand , decent and elegant in the undivided Punjab of yore.

Lahore bus stand didn't look substantially different from bus stands in the cities in our Punjab except that every morning some village folks would come with tin canisters and earthen pots full of 'sarson da saag' (cooked leaves of mustard plant) and maize floor which they would knead, roll into rotis and sell straight from the 'tandoor' or earthen ovens popularly used by common house holds and commercial

eating joints. The vendors would affectionately serve 'roti' and 'saag' with huge dollops of fresh home made butter to their clientele and the more enterprising amongst the lot would also keep boiled eggs and omelet. Through out my stay at Lahore I made it my daily routine to go over to the bus stand every morning and give myself liberal helpings of the saag, roti and butter as 'brunch.'

From the bus stand we proceeded to Anarkali Bazaar and checked into the Majestic Hotel. All three of us spent the night there and next day Pishora told that Gulzar and I should go over to another hotel while he himself wanted to continue in Majestic. I couldn't understand the reasons for this but didn't ask as Pishora being the guide for the mission was well within his rights to give such advice. While checking out I casually asked Pishora why he wanted us to shift. Pishora replied equally casually that he didn't consider three to be an auspicious number and therefore wanted that the three of us should not stay together at one and the same place. The two of us (Gulzar and myself) went over to a nearby hotel, 'Hotel Mianji' and checked in there. We went about our work in a routine and somewhat carefree manner as we had become so accustomed to Lahore that we felt as if we had always belonged to the place. Every morning I would go over to the bus stand and enjoy the delicious fare of saag, roti and makhan. This would be followed by forays into our operational areas for completing the assignment. The mission seemed to be going on exceptionally smoothly as each day we were returning with loads of valuable information. In the evenings I would take a round of Anarkali Bazaar or some other areas in the city. On one such evening Gulzar and I decided to go for a movie. We went to the Naaz Cinema Hall and saw the movie 'Chakori' that was going house full. It was an East Bengal production, a love story with Rani and Naved in the lead cast. After returning from the movie we discussed its story and were full of praise for the acting skills of Naved and Rani. This was followed by a brief discussion for the next day's program. I was brimming with a sense of job satisfaction and was dreaming how after this mission I shall rightfully be able to ask Col. Bhatti to give me the long since promised letter of appointment as I thought after what I provide the MI as part of this mission I will become simply indispensable for them. I went to sleep lost in these ideas full of anticipation for the next day's schedule.

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Into a Dark and Deep Abyss (18th September, 1966)

Hotel Mianji was not very different from New Majestic except that the later being in the famous Anarkali Bazar of Lahore was at a more prominent location. After a little wash and some refreshment Gulzar and I started discussing the day's scheduled. Gulzar suggested that we first go to Kasoor to ascertain the details about the field gun 'Rani' and after finishing the job there return to Lahore and go over to 'Mian Meer' area of Lahore Cantonment to collect the details desired by Col. Bhatti about the Units of Pakistan Army deployed in that area. Gulzar's logic was that even if we got delayed at Kasoor it won't matter much as we could operate till late within Lahore without worrying about returning all the way from Kasoor but if we got stuck in Kasoor even for a couple of hours more than expected there was very little possibility to utilize the left over portion of the day for any purposeful activity after arriving at Lahore late in the evening. Gulzar's consideration was thus purely logistic. I had just the opposite schedule in mind not for operational or logistic reasons but largely on sentimental grounds. Firstly as a Punjabi having been fed on fables and legends about Lahore being the cultural capital of the undivided Punjab with all its architectural heritage and cultural elegance I was so much enamored of the city that I wanted to see as much of it as possible at the earliest. Besides, as a resident of a cantonment town in India (Jullundur) since birth I was feeling nostalgic about my home back in Jullundur Cantt. at the very idea of visiting a cantonment in Pakistan.

To understand my nostalgia fully one has got to be familiar with the idea of cantonment that is a township concept unique to the Indian subcontinent evolved by the British colonial masters throughout the Indian sub continent since the later part of the 18th century. (The first cantonment was Barrackpore in West Bengal

established in 1762.) Basically meant for quartering of His Majesty's troops, these were mixed townships in which some civilians were also allowed to reside for the twin purposes of allowing social interaction between the British officers and the upper crust of the Indian social elite and fulfill the colonial masters' demands for cheap menial labor adequately. Almost all hill stations in the subcontinent from Murree (Near Rawalpindi now in Pakistan) down to Wellington (Near Ooty in south India) and all large towns from Quetta (now in Balochistan province of Pakistan to Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) had vast expanse of land set apart for the Cantonment. Each cantonment had three distinct sectors, the 'military area' meant for the defence installations and the residential quarters of the British officers, the 'bungalow area' where the Indian elite was permitted to reside in sprawling colonial type bungalows competing with their British masters in every respect and the 'bazaar area' in which lesser mortals be they the petty traders or the servants working in the military or the bungalow areas resided in their modest dwellings in stark contrast with the ostentation of the first two. The spatial planning, the architectural style and even the social etiquettes of the residents were almost identical in all cantonments irrespective of whether it was in down south of India or in the upper reaches of the Himalayas somewhere in Bengal or on the foothills of the mighty Karakoram. Once you entered a cantonment town you could not differentiate between Lahore and Jullundur or between Murree and Darjeeling. Mercifully this is one of the few legacies of the British rule that has been preserved by India and Pakistan alike. (I cannot speak of Bangladesh, as I have not visited any cantonment in that country). Making no bones about the real reason why I was so keen to visit Lahore cantonment I told Gulzar frankly, "yaar ghar di yaad a rahi hai; pahlaan chhavani dekhangey." (I am missing my home so let us first visit the cantonment).

A kindhearted man that Gulzar was, he readily agreed with my suggestion even though he knew it was not the ideal choice from practical angle. We accordingly headed for Mian Pir locality of Lahore Cantonment. The day seemed to have started on a very good note as most of the details which Col. Bhatti wanted us to collect about the Army Units located in that area were obtained by us without any strenuous efforts. We could gather not just the names of the units and their

Commanding Officers but also complete details about their manpower strength, type of vehicles used by them, their signaling equipment and its capabilities and the operational tasks given to each of them.

We had to now rush to Kasoor. The means local transport in those days in Lahore was the city buses fitted with rocket engines and the horse drawn carriages commonly called 'tongas' in the subcontinent. In both the cases the drivers devoted considerable time and resources for decorating their vehicles. The outer bodies of the buses particularly the area around windows and gates had beautiful hand painted sceneries, flowers and romantic poetry (shayari) written in artistic Urdu script called khattati or calligraphy. Occasionally if the driver happened to be a movie buff he would prevail upon the painter to draw figurines depicting the leading film artists of Pakistan popular in the country in the sixties even though the practice was not much in vogue due to aversion of Islamic traditions to drawing pictures of humans. The tongas were decorated with a colorful variety of festoons and the horse or the mare covered with splendid accoutrement including ostentatious garlands made of shining paper ('panni'), and eye covers elegantly crafted with a variety of material including fine embroidery done with silver thread on pieces of exquisite fabric be it silk or georgette. The horse or the mare drawing the carriage was most often an object of affection for the drivers who would address the beasts by proper names and treat them with affection generally shown only to fellow human beings and not mere beasts of burden.

As we were waiting for the local bus, a tonga came and stood by our side and the driver invited us to come along. Seeing us hesitant the driver sensed that perhaps we were in a hurry and were doubtful if a horse drawn carriage could take us to our destination with the same speed with which a bus could. "O bau aaja meri Sakina kisse rocket taun ghat nahi hai" (come along, my Sakina is no less than the rocket bus), he said giving admiring looks to the mare making it clear that its name was Sakina. "I once told Sakina that I had put my hard earned money to bet that you could run faster than a rocket bus and Sakina you have to save my prestige", he continued, "and bau believe me she reached a couple of seconds ahead of the bus." We could not resist the persuasive skills of the driver and got into the tonga. Within seconds Sakina started galloping with speed that

could put any automobile to shame.

As Sakina was galloping the driver started singing some popular film songs of the days melodiously with the perfection of an accomplished professional singer and confided in us that he had come to Lahore from his village primarily to make a career as playback singer in Pakistani film industry (Lollywood) but luck didn't favor and he has to remain contended with just occasionally ferrying some prominent singers and actors in his tonga. Thanks to Sakina's speed and her master's story telling skills we found ourselves at the main bus stand of Lahore sooner than we had expected and almost as fast as the city bus would have brought us. Luckily a bus was ready to leave for Kasoor and we got into it without any loss of time.

On reaching Kasoor we headed straight for our operational area. Luck seemed to be smiling on us that day. With some well planned efforts and a dash of common sense we could find the vicinity in which the field gun 'Rani' was installed and also ascertain its precise location. A bigger success came by our way when by dint of sheer luck and chance we came in contact with a soldier of the Pakistani Army who had actually handled the gun and knew everything worth knowing about its technical specifications, firing capabilities and also its draw backs. After a quick 'salam walequm' followed by lavish praise of 'our jaan baaz' soldiers and some choicest Punjabi abuses for the bloody 'kafirs' we could get what Col. Bhatti wanted us, virtually from the horse's mouth. We hugged the soldier, bade him 'Allah Hafiz' and left after promise of seeing again.

By the time we reached Kasoor bus stop the sun had already set and darkness had started descending. We were familiar with the bus stop and headed straight for the spot from where the buses left for Lahore. The lone tea vendor sitting nearby was looking somewhat pulled down indicating that he had had no good business during the course of the day. "Lahore di bus aan wallihai" (the bus for Lahore is about to come), he informed without our asking obviously hoping to be rewarded with some order for tea. We did not disappoint him and ordered for two cups to be served quickly. Before the vendor could prepare the tea and pass on to us we saw a civil jeep come and screech to a halt at the place where buses normally stand waiting for passengers to board. There were 3-4 persons in it, one sitting

beside the driver on the front seat and 2 or 3 in the rear. The tea vendor was visibly upset and asked the driver why he had parked the jeep there. "Tussi etthe apni gaddi vaad ditti hai hun bus kitthe khaloyegi" (you have pulled in your jeep here now where is the place for bus to stand), he said irritated. The person who was sitting in front jumped down and pressing his finger tightly against his lips gestured to the vendor to keep quiet in an apparent show of authority.

He came and stood next to me almost rubbing his shoulder against mine and giving a hard, villainous look whispered in my ear, "chal mere naal jeep wich aa tainu Lahore le chal na vaan" (come and sit with me in the jeep, I will take you to Lahore). My first reaction on the person's unsolicited offer was that he must be one of those wealthy landlords of rural Punjab of Pakistan who are notorious for being homosexual. I thought he must be one of those perverts trying to lure or bully youngsters for some male company. "Mainu bus wich jana hai" (I want to go by bus), I replied. The person pulled himself even closer and putting his mouth on my ear whispered again, "get into the jeep with me you kafir bastard or else I will shoot you." As he whispered these chilling words and drew himself nearer I could feel a revolver under his shirt rubbing against my abdomen. I realized that the matter was something more serious than just a wealthy landlord looking for homosexual company. Gulzar seemed to have guessed the seriousness earlier than me and had started walking towards a small kiosk selling beedis and cigarettes. The 2-3 persons sitting in the rear of the jeep jumped down hastily, chased Gulzar and catching him by the scruff of his neck shouted, "tu kitthey chalya haramjade" (Where are you running you bastard).

A small crowd gathered and surprisingly some of the persons started siding with us assuming that persons bullying us were from the local police station wanting us to cough up some money in illegal gratification. Even when tension in my mind was at the peak, I couldn't help feeling amused at the striking similarity of public perception about the police personnel in India and Pakistan. After all there were certain characteristics attributable to our shared past which Mr. Redcliffe simply couldn't wipe off our minds.

The man in charge of the team waved his hands as if in the air and immediately

some 15-20 persons closed in towards us. They pretended to be common passengers waiting for their buses but it was clear to me and perhaps also to Gulzar that they were planted by the team just in case additional manpower was needed to cope with the situation. One of them pointing to the man in charge shouted loudly to the gathered crowd, "Ai virji security wale sarkari bande hain ainanun apna kam karndeo te tussi vi apna apna kam karo" (this is a team from the security agency, let them do their job and all of you also return mind your own business). The crowd that had gathered to sympathise with us melted away quickly. It was clear that while the local police was a hated lot with whom the local people could join issues, no one wanted to get involved when it came to the mysterious 'security wale virji'.

I recalled that during training we were told about the various agencies in Pakistan we had to guard against. One of these agencies, ustadji had told us was the FIU (Field Intelligence Unit) of the Pakistani Army. We were told that FIU teams were generally active in the towns along the Indo-Pak border and they randomly patrolled the entry and exit points such as bus stands and railway stations of these towns, in civil vehicles and are often themselves also in civvies. The local people normally avoided getting into any controversy with them because they were notorious for lifting their own people and torturing them into confessing that they were Indian agents if they felt that they were falling short of their targets of capturing some minimum number of Indian agents every month or quarter. Our trainers at the MI didn't regard the FIU as a professionally competent outfit but had warned us about the inhuman methods of torture they tried even on their own compatriots. I was slowly recalling these details even while a storm was brewing in my mind about what future held in store for us. I had strong suspicion that the FIU had caught up with us but I had not completely given up yet because of the knowledge that more often than not these teams end up capturing their own people and if luck favored us we could make them believe that this time too they have captured not any Indians but their own Pakistani brethren Mohammad Salim and Gulzar Malik.

In the melee that followed our tryst with the FIU I didn't notice that the jeep had been already moved towards an isolated spot away from public glare. Gulzar and

I were caught tightly by our arms and made to walk towards the jeep. No one from the onlookers was allowed near it as it had been cordoned off by some half a dozen persons who seemed to have been part of the crowd that had gathered in response to the signal from the man in charge after some people had started sympathizing with us. On reaching near the jeep our hands and feet were tied, we were blindfolded and shoved in to the rear of the jeep. After a short drive the jeep seemed to have reached a completely deserted place and stopped. As we were blindfolded I could not make out if it was some kind of an enclosure or just the roadside. "What is your name?" someone from the team, perhaps the man in charge sitting in front thundered. I wasn't sure whether the question was directed to Gulzar or to me and didn't respond. As I was still lying bundled in the jeep a heavy blow landed near my abdomen accompanied by some filthy abuses and the question was repeated. "Mohammad Salim," I said trying to sound genuine. "I am asking your real Sikh name and not your cover name," the person thundered again, this time more menacingly. "Mohammad Salim," I repeated confidently and added, "why should I need a cover name after my parents have gifted me with the most powerful name on earth, the name of our beloved prophet Mohammad, sallalaho alahai wale wasallam", I tried to appear authentic. "Are you a Musalman," the second question came. "Yes of course," I said where upon the in charge asked one of his men to check up. I felt someone straightening my legs, pulling down my pants and underwear and vaguely guessed that some torchlight was being flashed near my private parts. "Janab lagda te musalman hi hai," the man told his boss and added that it could be 'one of those cases of surgery' also.

"You call yourself a Muslim and this is how you treat a fellow Muslim," I thought it was now my turn to speak, and went on, "My hands and feet are tied. I am blindfolded and you humiliate me by stripping me in this helpless condition. Is this what your parents taught you? Is this what the holy Koran teaches you? Shame on you," I said. The person did not respond but the beating stopped. He then shouted at Gulzar, "Oye tu kyon eddan chup karke sutta paya hai haramzade, tuvi ta kuchh bol hun" (Why are you keeping quiet, you bastard". You also speak out now). "Main hun ki akkhan" Gulzar said, "jede bande apne aap nu musalman kande hoye lekin jinnan wich mominaan di koi vi sifat na hove utthe main bolke ki

karanga" (What can I speak? I am in the company of people who call themselves Muslims but who don't have any of the qualities of a believer. What is left for me to speak?) Gulzar said in an explicit show of indignation. "Tera matlab ki hai"? (What do you mean?), the man shouted again. "Matlab ai hai kaka ke Koran sharif wich Allah taala da farman hai ke momin o hunda hai jeda khuda di ibadat te dujje insan naal gal neevan ho ke kare. Hun ibadat da te mainu pata nahin hai tusi karde vi ho ki nahin, jitthe tak dujje insan naal gal karan da swal hai main twahnu vekh liya tussi kinne neeven ho ke gal karde ho," (what I mean is that in the Holy Koran it has been stated that a believer is one who offers his prayers and talks to another human being in humility. I do not know whether you ever offer prayers to Allah at all but how much humility you are showing while talking to another human being I have seen for myself just now).

The man pretended to have been not impressed and asked Gulzar to tell him where exactly was this stated in the Holy Koran. "Go and see shura-e-al-mominun," Gulzar said confidently and added that perhaps it was contained in the beginning of that shura. One of the persons sitting in the rear of the jeep to guard us said to his boss spontaneously, "Janab, ikgall ta pakki hai. Je ai bande musalman vi han te India de musalman hongai. Ai hoji sufiyana gallan jyada karke India de musalman hi karde hain." (Sir even if these chaps are muslims they must be Indian muslims as it is only those fellows who indulge in this kind of sufi like talk). "Oye chup kar oye. Indian musalman ta kafiraan taun vi badtar hunde hain. Je musalman hunde ta hizrat karke Pakistan aa jande." (Shut upyou fool! Indian muslims are worse than the kafirs. Had they been muslims they would have migrated to Pakistan rather than hanging on there.) boss seemed to have agreed.

I had known Gulzar very closely for quite sometime. I knew he was a noble soul but I had no idea about the deep knowledge of the holy Koran that I heard from him just now. I knew he was a protestant Christian and his real name was Gulzar Masihi Malik. (For operational purposes he had dropped the word 'Masih' and we all called him Gulzar Malik or just Gulzara in keeping with the style in rural Punjab on both sides of the Indo-Pak divide.) Malik was the surname of his preconversion faith and he had retained it alongside the new tag of 'Masih.' Hearing his discourse on the Koran I realized that he had retained much more

than just the surname of his ancestors. During our training at the MI I used to often flaunt my knowledge of Urdu and Islam but Gulzar never tried to overshadow me – something he could have easily done because of his deep knowledge of the scripture – in a bid to impress the trainers or the senior officers of the MI. He was a true believer who practiced the preaching of the prophet of Islam inspite of conversion by his ancestors to Christianity.

10

Police Station Kasoor

As I was lost in these thoughts our captors were perhaps reaching the place where they wanted to incarcerate us. From whatever little I could overhear, I could make out that we were to be lodged in the lockup of Kasoor police station overnight and some persons from the Army (FIU) were to come to pickup us early next morning. When the jeep stopped I could guess from the kind of sounds and voices coming from all directions that the place indeed was a police station. Some one, perhaps a constable was telling the man in charge of the FIU team that nothing was possible before the arrival of the 'SHO saab.' (Station House Officer of a police station is an almighty in his own right as not even a leaf can move without his approval within the police station. Whether a detainee is to be tortured or kept in comfort is decided exclusively by the SHO. The institution of SHO as well as his all pervasive powers are common in India and Pakistan as both countries inherited and preserved the same system of police administration which was bequeathed to them by the British rulers). The constable made it clear to our captors that we couldn't even be off-loaded from the jeep until the SHO came and agreed to take us into his custody.

Then there was a commotion. The sound of heavy boots and smart salutes were heard along with words like 'sikhs', 'kafirs' and Indians' uttered in whispers. The SHO had arrived. It seemed the man in charge of the FIU team had accompanied the SHO in to his chamber. After sometime we were pushed down from the jeep and I felt in spite of the blindfold, that we were encircled by large number of armed personnel. As we were standing, persons passing by our side (probably the constabulary assigned to the station) simply kicked, punched or slapped us calling us 'kafir Sikhs from India.' Some of them were even prodding us with the butts of their rifles and hurling most filthy abuses in Punjabi. After a while we

were told to march up to the chamber of 'SHO saab'. As we started walking with great difficulty because of our legs having become stiff like a rod on account of being tied together since long, the police personnel escorting us kept beating and abusing. When we finally reached the chamber one of the escorts slapped me for not having the manners to offer 'salam' (salute) to the SHO. "How can I know that SHO saab is here because I can't see" I pleaded with my invisible tormentor and he quickly responded with another hard slap saying, "Jabaan ladanda e haramjade kafir" (How dare you speak back you kafir bastard). Gulzar too was being beaten without any rhyme or reason. "Salam walequm janab SHO saab," I said to cut the long story short. The SHO ignored and continued to talk in whispers with the FIU man. The conversation was being carried in chaste Punjabi and went like this.

"OK then, we will send our team to pickup these kafirs in the morning" (Changa fir assi savere kisse nu bhejangai innan kafiran nu len lai"), the FIU man seemed to be telling the SHO. "Where is the need", the SHO replied adding, "This is what I don't understand about you people. Our policy in the Police is clear. Soften the bastards overnight (saari raat kafiraan nu narmawo) and if nothing useful seems to be coming out, throw the body in the canal before the day- break. That way you are out of all those hassles of wasting time in running to the courts." (Court kutchery da koi chakkar vi nahin rainda). "Don't do that", the FIU man sounded the SHO and reminded him of some incident of the past, "Pichhali vaar jadaun tussiai kitta si kinna rola paya si. Je sadde colonel saab saath nahin dende te twahdi fiti utarjani si." (Remember the problems you would have run into last time when you did that kind of a thing. Had our Colonel not supported you, you would have lost your stripes).

The FIU man apparently left and I was ordered to march towards the 'havalat' (lock-up). I was asked to follow the policemen and on pleading inability to do so because of the blindfold I was pushed forward like cattle with some punches from cane or rifle butt landing randomly on my body. I could feel that Gulzar who was beside me all along this ordeal was perhaps missing. On reaching the destination that seemed to be an extremely small cell with thick smell of stale dampness and hardly any trace of air or light I heard loud screams of Gulzar from some where nearby. He was being beaten severely and was crying like a dying man. My heart

went out to him. What an innocuous human being he was. I remembered how during our training he had told the MI bosses clearly that he was willing to cross over the border and collect whatever information the MI wanted for the defence of the mother land but he would under no circumstances engage in any kind of violence against the Pakistani citizens. "O vi sadde phra hagai janab" (they too are our brothers sir), he would tell the MI trainers without mincing words. I also remembered how when once he was chided by Ustadji for being so kindly disposed towards the Muslims (Pakistanis) inspite of being a Christian himself, Gulzar had told ustadji that he shall forfeit all the grace of God and His Messenger Jesus Christ if he started believing that non Christians could be treated unkindly. Is this the kind of treatment he deserved from the Pakistanis? After a while the cries from Gulzar were no longer heard and a scary silence descended. I started fearing for the worst for Gulzar and felt scared myself.

The chain of my thoughts was broken when I heard some footsteps inside my cell. Before I could ask who it was, I found myself at the receiving end of severe thrashing by 3-4 persons using an assortment of instruments from their bare hands to rods and leather whips for the purpose. "Oye tussi kaun ho? O menu maar de kyaun ho", (Who are you and why are you thrashing me), I started yelling. The beating continued getting more and more vicious. In between I heard someone saying, "Maar da kaun hai assi ta teri jamatalashi le rahe haan" (who is beating? we are only carrying out a body search on you). I fell down on the floor and felt that some one – a hefty person had sat on me and was raining heavy blows all over my body, hurling filthiest abuses at the same time. After some time I fell unconscious and heard someone giving instructions to pour some water over my face and head to see if I was dead or alive.

In my state of semi consciousness I felt that I was transported back to my childhood days in Jullundur. I was playing with a group of friends when a very small chick of dove had fallen on the ground. In fact a cat had climbed the tree and had tried to uproot the fragile nest perhaps in search of food. In the tumult that followed the poor little nestling of a dove chick fell down. We left our game of roadside football and converged towards the chick surrounding him in a circle. As most of the time we used to play in front of my house, my mother heard the

commotion and came out. On seeing the badly injured chick she asked me to bring some water and sprinkle on its face. "If he has even a small trace of life left he will be revived with the soothing effect of the water," she said with a tinge of optimism. We gently sprinkled the water on its face and also tried to pour a few drops tenderly in to his lovely pink beak but the poor chick simply didn't show any signs of life. We all felt sorry and resumed the game but my mother was so sad that for a long time after the incident she used to start crying in sobs for the dead chick.

Lying almost completely unconscious on the floor of the cell badly bruised, the images of water being poured on the dying chick, his ultimate death and my mother's inaudible but pathetic sobs started haunting me. "If my mother could not bear the death of the little chick and used to cry for long after every one else had forgotten about it, how was she going to cope with the news of what had just now happened to me and perhaps what could shortly afterwards happen to me,' I started worrying and crying silently. I felt a person rudely prodding me, asking me to give up the tantrums (nakhre na kar oye), get up and take tea. His prodding could make me conscious but I didn't have the strength to get up and hold the tea mug in my hands. The person started beating me again accusing me of simply throwing tantrums just to avoid giving a statement. As I was falling down he asked some of his colleagues to hold me standing and not let me fall. "Cha da mug phar" (hold the tea mug), he shouted and shoved what he said was a tea mug in my hands. It fell down spilling boiling hot liquid all over my body because of which perhaps I jumped. The person seemed quite satisfied and yelled, "Hun aaya na tainu hosh, vekhya meri cha da kamaal" (so now you have become conscious again. Do you see the miracle of my tea.) He then asked me to make a statement about my name, place of origin and the purpose of my visit to Pakistan. The moment I uttered 'Mohammad Salim,' he started beating again banging my head against the wall. I again became unconscious and felt that the person had left after instructing his subordinates to throw a bucketful of water 'so that the kafir waits a little more before going to hell, at least till the SHO saab comes to see the fun'.

I was in deep slumber with the images of the dying chick and my mother's sobs

continuously haunting me when I once again felt the commotion that is caused in a police station across the subcontinent only by the arrival of the all powerful 'SHO saab' on the scene. My guess was right. A hard kick in the abdomen perhaps by one of the cronies was the announcement of the SHO's arrival to me. "Statement de vai apna" (give your statement), the SHO said curtly in a no nonsense manner adding mechanically, "naun" (your name?). "Mohammad Salim," I said mustering all the strength I could to make myself sound confident. What followed could not be termed unexpected. After letting lose all his manpower to make pulp of me he suddenly ordered his men to leave him alone as he wanted to talk to me in confidence. I was lying on the floor of the cell, too exhausted to even speak properly. I felt the man leaning down on me and whispering in my ear, "Oye gal sun oye mundiye tera te hun jo hou tainu pata I hai. Tainu te marna hi hai. Hun tere statement naal mera kuch bhala ho jau ta tera ki jau oye kafra! Oye maran taun pailan kuch mera vi bhala karja oye haramjadiya." (You know very well that the only fate that awaits you is death you infidel. Now if before dying you give your statement before me, what do you lose?). Not finding me responding to his tricks he started talking about Gulzar saying that he had already died but before that he had told everything about our real identity and our mission. "Allah shall grant him place in paradise" (Allah o nu jannat nashin kare), he said, "because of that noble soul I am sure to get the police medal. Now you also be a good boy and tell me everything so that apart from the medal I also get an out of turn promotion. You know you are not going out alive from this cell so come on be a good boy at least for a while before you die. After all it is in the interest of every dying man that he does some good to others".

To be frank I felt rattled by what the SHO told me about Gulzar, but kept my cool as our trainers had prepared us well for such situations. Without giving away my inner feelings I told the SHO coolly, "Je ohne twahnu sab kuch das ditta hai te hun mainu puchhan di ki lor vai janab SHO saab. Ik gall main vi janab nu das denna vaan ik musalman nun dujje musalman da khoon allah taala kade muaf nahin karda." (If that fellow has told you everything then why do you have to ask anything from me. And Sir, let me also tell you one thing. Allah never forgives a muslim for the blood of another muslim). The SHO seemed completely exasperated. He

leaned little closer to me and whispered extremely slowly in my ear, "listen kaka! I forgive you for not telling about yourself and your mission to me so long as you do not divulge anything to the Army fellows also. If you keep silence here you have to keep silence there also. But if I come to know that having fooled me the whole night you have made a statement before them, I shall skin you alive (chamri udher dyanga). And never forget that wherever in Pakistan you make a confession your case will come for a trial through my thana only because the illegal border crossing by you is already shown in the Kasoor sector in the records and even the General of the Pakistani Army will not be able to change that. I have suffered once because of these 'Fauz wallas'. They once took the case out of my jurisdiction by showing the crossing from another sector just because I agreed to their suggestion of filling the records later after they had finished their interrogation. This time I have already recorded that you were captured in Kasoor and tomorrow morning when the FIU fellows come I shall obtain their signatures on the 'rojnamcha' (daily diary) so that they don't change any thing. Therefore janab Mohammad Salim sahab Kibla," he added sarcastically, "either tell everything to me or don't tell anything to the Fauzis as well." I thought his utterances were the epilogue and he would be leaving shortly but he kept on sitting and muttering to himself, "Every time I become a laughing stock before my seniors because of these Fauzis. I keep the fellows over night in my lock up and they behave like dumb brutes. The moment they go in the Fauzis' custody, they blurt out everything and I bear the brunt of my seniors' taunts and anger. Let me see what happens this time." The muttering kept on receding and finally stopped indicating that the SHO had left the cell leaving behind thick stench of alchohol.

I continued to languish depressed and lonesome with every pore of my body in severe pain due to merciless beating by the SHO and his cronies. The images of the dying dove chick looking at me and my group of friends pitiably beseeching us to do something to save him from death and my mother's sobbing face at the lovely little creature's death continued to haunt me amid shudders at the very thought of my friend, philosopher and guide Gulzar being no more if what the SHO had said about him was right. The dying chick's face was a variable being replaced frequently with Gulzar's and my own face by turns. Are we going to meet the same

fate as that lovely little creature leaving my mother to sob alone with no one around to comfort her? I abhorred the very idea of seeing my mother in pain and decided instantly that I shall not let that happen because of myself. I saw another image of my mother often telling us lovingly, "Jeda bachcha rondu hoye rabb o di madad nahin karda." (God never helps the child who simply keeps crying.) I had already made my resolve to stand up, buck up and boldly face whatever calamity befell me. "Na dainyam na palayanam," I quietly recited an immortal verse from the 'Bhagvad Gita' one of our holiest scriptures. It meant, "I shall neither give up nor cry". From that very moment a new Kishorilal alias Mohammad Salim was born. It is this new born who kept me alive through a series of unspeakable atrocities to which my Pakistani captors subjected me over the coming decade or so.

Lost in myriad thoughts amidst the resolve to never say die I didn't quite realize when did I fall asleep. It must have been quite late in the night, or perhaps in the wee hours of the morning as I was so fast asleep when a policeman came to the cell in the morning that he had to kick hard and abuse on top of his voice to wake me up in the morning. "Chaloye bhen**** kafir! O aa gaye tere phyo tainu len nu," (come on you sister fucker infidel your fathers have come to take you along), he was shouting, kicking me at the same time. "I want to urinate and ease myself," I said. "Shut up and follow me straight to SHO saab's chamber," he replied showing no concern for my request and started pushing me. My hands were tied behind, legs tied together and blindfold still on.

When I reached the SHO's chamber he was talking to someone. Perhaps the FIU men were already with him. "Salam walequm janab", Isaid addressing the SHO. "Chupkar oye salam walequm de puttar. O apna nimaskar ja kikende ne aunu Sat Shri Akal kyon nahin bolda haramjade", (Shut up you son of salam walequm; why don't you say your own greeting of namaskar or Sat Shri akal or whatever that is), he said visibly irritated. His cronies who had encircled me followed suit as each tried to give a slap, punch or kick. "Ai levo janab twahdi amanat twahde hawale" (Here you have your detainee), the SHO said apparently addressing the FIU man sitting with him. The police personnel encircling me again started pushing me out of the chamber. I was thinking of Gulzar who was not around. I feared for his life. Suddenly a mischievous idea flashed in my mind. "Changa janab SHO saab

Allah Hafiz," I said even as I was being pushed by the SHO's cronies and added, "main twahdi kal raat wali gall da khyal rakhanga." (OK sir SHO, bye; I shall keep in mind what you told me last night.) The SHO didn't respond. I could not see anything because of the blind fold but I could easily visualize the embarrassment and suspicion that might have become conspicuous on the SHO's and the FIU man's face respectively. As I was being marched out I knew for sure what I had sown in their minds. In my own way I had taken revenge for what the SHO and his cronies might have done to Gulzar and for the beating to which they had subjected me the previous night.

After what I had uttered in the SHO's chamber he would have wanted to get rid of my presence at the earliest. His cronies too would have read their master's wish as, soon thereafter their sole preoccupation seemed to be to push me out without any loss of time. I too had no intention of staying in the police station any longer after having dropped the huge brick.

11

Under the Pakistani Army's Quarter Guard

After a quick unceremonious walk out of the SHO's chamber I was shoved in the rear of the jeep to lie on its floor like a sick buffalo calf. I could feel some persons sitting guard on the rear seat and another person, perhaps the senior most member of the team occupying the front seat by the driver's side. No one uttered a word and the deafening silence had started weighing heavy on my mind all the more because of the blindfold that made me feel oppressed and choked. I was also thinking every now and then about Gulzar and feeling sad. A semblance of normalcy came in the air when the person sitting on the front seat shouted at me asking what had the SHO told me last night that I had assured him to keep in mind. I instantly felt lighted up at the success of the trick I had played and decided not to let the game be up. "That is something I am under oath never to reveal. I have given my word to the SHO and as a musalman I have to honor the word given to a brother in faith," I said without showing any signs or fumbling or hesitation. For some reason that I could not comprehend the person also kept quiet and didn't pester for an answer. After a little while, the jeep seemed to have entered the highway. As it was still early morning time there weren't too many vehicles and the road seemed to be deserted.

After more than an hour or so I felt we had entered a crowded area. From the kind of noises heard I guessed we were in the bazaars of Lahore. Having driven for sometime in the city it seemed we were again in some sparsely populated area. Perhaps it was the cantonment area of Lahore. I was still busy guessing when the jeep stopped and I was pushed down and marched for a small distance before being thrown into a small cell. The cell was so small that one could neither stand erect, nor stretch the legs in sitting position. Crouching seemed to be the sole

option and that was an agonizing option for me because of the severe beating all over my legs, arms, chest and head. I became nervous and started breathing heavily with unusual rapidity. Very soon I realized that the breathing problem was being compounded because of the dampness in the cell. Within seconds I felt the resolve made by me the previous night never to say die was withering away under severe physical pressure. Gasping painfully for every breath I started screaming loudly, "Oye main mar gaya! oye twahnu Allah Pak da wasta mainu bachao!" (I am dying! For Allah's sake please save my life!) There was no response and I felt as if I was talking to the thick walls of the cell. In fact there was no sign of any human presence anywhere near by. After wailing and yelling for sometime I fell silent but my resolve not to give up again started firming up on its own. Perhaps it was due to that infallible but mysterious instinct of survival that the Almighty has bestowed upon every living being in just the right quantity.

The solitude was finally broken when a hoarse and grumpy voice typical of Army men giving commands asked me to turn my face towards the wall so that he could push my lunch; two puris and half mug of tea. "Why are you asking me to turn my face towards the wall," I asked and added, "You are free to push whatever you want to push inside." "We are under orders to ensure that you do not see any human face while you are interred here," the soldier replied with the simplicity common to soldiers of India and Pakistan alike. "But I am already blindfolded, how can I see anyone even if my face is towards the gate of my cell," I asked again. The soldier's response was so sweet that for a moment I forgot my sufferings and felt like hugging that simpleton. "Mainu nahin pata," he said, "JCO saab kende ne ke patti bandhi hoye taan vi bande nu kuchh parchhain vangar kuchh diss da rehanda hai." (I don't know. My JCO says even when the blindfold is on a person sees the shadowy outlines of all objects in front of his eyes.) I guessed he must be a young man like me hailing from the rural Punjab (so what if his part of the Punjab happened to be on the western side of the Redcliffe line), his innocence still unpolluted and undisturbed by the indoctrination stuffed in young minds in the name of motivation and training by the defence establishment of his country. After all we share the same ethnic stock, same sub-continental social values, same food habits and the same gusty sweet Punjabi language. My God! The simplicity

of the soldier's mind threw me into a maze of thoughts and I started wondering how could the young lad be an enemy for me.

What a world of illusions the colonial masters had created and left us to dwell in, I was wondering unmindful of the severe and abusive admonition some one had started giving to my newly found young hero. Perhaps it was the JCO who having seen the youngster talking to me without being aggressive or abusive was taking him to task for such gross dereliction of duty. It was time he took over he thought and started prodding me with a roller that he seemed to have shoved in the cell through the iron grill of its gate. "Haramjade jaban ladanda hai nhyane naal. Chup karke apni cha puri chuk le te jaban nu band rakh " (how dare you talk to the young soldier you bastard. Now quietly pickup the tea and puri and keep your mouth shut), he shouted struggling to target and hit me with the rod that he had already managed to see past the iron grill. I had decided not to be done down by the bully and said assertively, "Mainu bahar kaddo, mainu pishab karna hai." (Take me out of the cell I have to urinate). Perhaps it was too much for the JCO to take and he simply blew his top. After shouting a non-stop string of filthy abuses – and there is no dearth of them in our dear Punjabi language -he flung a cruel taunt before marching away from the scene. "Andar kisay kone wich karle haramjade assi edda vadda hall ditta hai tainu". (Do it in some corner inside. After all we have given you such a big hall you bastard.)

Urinating inside the small cell without being able to even pull down the trousers because of hands being tied was unbearable to even think of. But there is a limit beyond which human endurance simply doesn't last. I had not answered the calls of nature for more than 18 hours now and my endurance had already been stretched beyond its limit. Lying bundled and crouched on the floor of that small cell I lost all control and urinated right in my pants. The cell was filled with stench and the dampness increased manifolds. I once again felt demoralized and remembered the comforts of our modest home in Jullundur Cantt. I recalled how fussy I had been about having a bathroom exclusively for use by me. In fact I had emotionally blackmailed my father into using his influence with his colleagues in the MES and have an additional bathroom constructed sans authorization. My mother had thrown her weight in my favor, as she could not bear the idea of her

children facing any discomfort. "Mamma dear do you know the condition of your son at this unfortunate moment," I said to myself sobbing silently and kicked the tea and puris the soldier had pushed in the cell.

For the next three days I survived only on tea taken sparingly (I didn't take every time it was brought). I didn't touch any of the puris served to me by the soldiers. Because of the resultant physical weakness I used to keep lying motionless and speechless in the cell most of the time. This seemed to have alarmed my captors who thought I might die leaving them accountable under the circumstances. The JCO who had abused the young soldier for conversing with me tried to bully me so that I regularly ate whatever was being provided. He was a vicious man who would abuse Mahatma Gandhi saying that by refusing food I was following in the footsteps of "that kafir baniya." I felt incensed at his foul mouth but controlled myself as any sign of annoyance could easily give away my Indian identity. I had to therefore perforce join that rascal in abusing the father of the nation and pretend that if I was not eating regularly it was because I was not able to offer Namaz and not because of any influence of the 'kafir baniya'. Offering Namaz was not possible I clarified, because of the impure state of my body as I was urinating in my pants and was not able to even wash my hands, let alone do 'wazu' in a proper manner. The trick worked and on the third day I was taken out to answer the call of nature and take bath. My hands and feet were untied but the blindfold wasn't removed. I felt great relief after the bath and the few moments of partial freedom out in the open. Back in the cell I offered 'Namaz' with the perfection of the devout leaving my captors including even the wily JCO impressed. While no human interaction was allowed and the command to turn my face towards the wall every time the guards came to shove tea and puris in the cell remained intact, I was allowed to come out for answering the calls of nature with my hands and feet untied twice daily. Proper facilities for 'wazu' were also afforded every morning and evening when I would offer my prayers (Namaz).

What baffled me however was that no one ever came to interrogate me even though occasionally I used to hear some senior military officers talking to the guards about who I was and what for I was incarcerated. The guards would invariably respond in hushed voices for fear of being overheard by me but I could

make out that they knew nothing beyond the basic information that I was put in the quarter guard by the FIU on suspicion of being a Sikh. (I later learnt that the term 'Sikh' was used commonly for any one suspected of being an Indian agent.) Occasionally I could also overhear the guards telling the inquisitive visitors that notwithstanding the allegations of the FIU, they had little doubt that I was a musalman and a devout one at that. Every time I heard the guards say so I felt satisfied and happy about my professional competence as MI operative relieving me howsoever temporarily of the gloom that otherwise seemed endless.

I spent nearly two weeks in this quarter guard after which I was moved to another location. The shifting came as suddenly for me as for the guards as I could hear the JCO and the other soldiers on guard duty grumbling about the problems they had to face to make arrangements hastily in the absence of adequate notice.

The mode and manner of transportation was as usual. Hands and feet tied, shoved like a bundle of grass on the floor in the rear portion of the jeep with three or four persons occupying the seats above and one person, invariably the senior most member of the escort team, sitting on the front seat by the side of the driver as per military protocol for an official vehicle. The jeep was driven for over an hour but from the noises heard around I guessed we were still in the cantonment area of Lahore and the long drive was only a red herring to put me off my guesswork about the real location. By now I had become a sounds expert of sorts and from the kind of sounds heard around I could make out that the place was once again an army quarter guard. The cell here was better than the previous ones. It was small but there was space to either stand erect or sit down and stretch the legs. It wasn't damp or smelly either. My hands and feet remained tied while I was inside it but were untied when ever I needed to answer the calls of nature for which the guards agreed to bring me out as often as I asked them. On my part I returned their gesture by making it a point to not ask for the liberty unless it was absolutely necessary. The guard company seemed comprised of some half a dozen men headed by a JCO. From their talks I could guess that they were all hailing from Baluchistan province of Pakistan and apparently also belonged to the Baluch Regiment of Pakistani Army. They were a well-knit team and I sometimes overheard them talking to each other complaining how the Baluch soldiers were

discriminated against in the Pakistani Army. They also condemned not just the Punjabi domination of their army but also the unislamic and selfish attitude of their Punjabi compatriots whom they referred to as 'jahil' and 'khudgarj'.

The soldiers were kindhearted, simple souls, particularly the JCO who seemed to be a paragon of the Islamic virtue of compassion. Soon after my arrival in his custody he said in his broken Punjabi loaded with heavy Baluch accent, "Vaikh kakke tu aitthe kyaun laya gaya e te tera ki gunah ve mae nain jaanda; mainu jaanan di lor vi ke ve. Teri umir da mera apna puttar ve. Mae rabb kolun duva karaanga vai koi jalim tere utte kade vi koi julamna kar sake. Jitthun tan tu sadde havale rehsi ai samajh tu ik sachche musalman di panah vich hai. Teri hifazat sadda farz e. Tainu assi kise julam da sikar nahin hon dyangai. Lekin je tu nassan di koshish kitti te assan tainu goli maar deni e te oh de naal sadde dil vich vi taklif hosi; ess gallda hamesha dhyan rakhin kake." (See young man, why have you been brought here and what is your crime is not known to me. It is also none my business to try and know that. Back home I have a son exactly of your age and I have reason to pray to God that no one should torture you. So long as you are in my custody you are under the protection of a true muslim. To protect you from hurt is my religious duty. I'll see to it that no one tortures you. Just remember one thing. Never try to escape from here, as in that case I shall have no option but to shoot you even though that will make me sad.)

The JCO kept his word as his men treated me with grace and dignity and never ever uttered any abuse or did anything that might make me feel humiliated. They gave me the same food that they themselves ate and even enquired if anything was wrong whenever I appeared rundown or gloomy. Whenever I wanted to thank him for his kindness he brushed aside the topic simply saying that there was no need for any 'shukriya' as he was only doing what the prophet of Islam has ordained for him. His kindness, simplicity and profound knowledge of the spirit of Islam often brought to my mind the memories of Gulzar. Had the wily SHO of Kasoor actually killed him or is Gulzar still alive, if he is alive where and how he might be; I would often wonder. Every time I came across the elderly Baluch JCO I instantly started thinking of Gulzar. The kindness of the Baluch JCO left me with a unique solace as seeing him I thought even if Gulzar has been done to death

by the devils in Kasoor police station his spirit shall continue to remain alive so long as there were people like my Baluch friends around.

My tryst with peace and tranquility under the benign protection of the kind Baluch soldiers was short lived as exactly after a week (or perhaps on the sixth day) my newfound friends told me to get ready quickly as they had received orders to dispatch the detainee to some undisclosed location. "Tainu laen nun team aan vali e kaka," the JCO said and added affectionately, "Khuda taali da bharosa rakhin te hosla na harin, Allah vadda Rahim te Karim e." (The team is coming to pick you up. Have faith in Allah and don't lose heart, Allah is most compassionate and merciful). I had no doubt in my mind that the JCO knew that the place I was being shifted to was not an easy one and he wanted to say his words of kindness to me before the team came to pick me up so that his kind disposition towards me didn't become known to his other colleagues in the Army.

By now I had become so resigned to fate that whenever I was to be shifted from one quarter guard to another I would mechanically march out and jump on to the place I knew was meant for me in the jeep. In a way the state of my mind had been conditioned on the lines of an animal marching towards the slaughter house in the hope that whatever was destined to happen, happens without any delay or suspense. The escorts no longer had to make any efforts to either make me walk or shove me in the vehicle. My experience about the shifting this time was somewhat different in as much as the escort team appeared to be extraordinarily savage and boorish. Even when I was getting into the jeep on my own, one of the escorts kicked me hard in the buttock mouthing filthy abuses. When I protested saying that there was no need to kick when I was myself getting in another person closed in and started hitting with the butt of his rifle. After the jeep rolled on all the persons sitting in the rear started hitting and abusing without any provocation. They then started mouthing unspeakable abuses for the Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities challenging me at the same time to object to them and 'see the fun.' "Bhen****kafir, panja rupayye wich kise hajjamkolun nikka ja operation karake apne apnu musalman kainda hai, Mohammad salim da puttar madar****". (Just by getting some small surgery from a barber for no more than some five rupees you call yourself a Musalman), one of the escorts who was continuously hitting

and abusing me ever since we left, started accusing.

I knew that by using unspeakable language against the Sikh gurus and the Hindu deities they were only trying to provoke me in to reacting so that they could pick up some brownie points before their bosses by flaunting their achievement in having 'broken' the detainee even before reaching the interrogation chamber. I also knew equally well that what awaited me at my next destination was real hard interrogation by some of the worst sadists of the Pakistani establishment and was quietly preparing myself mentally for the ordeal ahead. In the process I lost my usual mental count of the time we had spent in the journey and the distance it indicated. I also failed to take note of the noises around for my guesswork about the place we were cruising around or headed for. I had nevertheless decided that I should not react to any kind of provocation and walk in to the trap so painstakingly being planned and laid by my escorts. I therefore continued to brave all the blows and abuses but didn't open my mouth.

The first round of this war of wits had apparently gone to me as we had already reached the new place of my custody without the escorts being able to provoke me or elicit any information in any other manner. The other side tried to express their frustration by throwing me down – almost dashing me against the road below- from the jeep on reaching our destination. From the lighting point up to the cell also they kept prodding and pushing as if I were a beast reluctant to carry the burden loaded on the back. The cell was as could be expected dark, dingy, damp and stuffy with foul smell. When I entered I felt that there was another person already inside. Because of total darkness I could not sense even the shadows the young soldier had said could be felt in spite of the blindfold if I did not turn my face towards the wall but I could clearly hear the sound of some one moving slowly and surreptitiously. I could even hear heavy breathing by another person nearby. My first reaction was that the cell could be haunted and the sounds were perhaps due to presence of some ghost in the cell. This was a place where detainees are tortured, many of who might have breathed their last here and their spirits might haunt the place, I thought. Besides as a resident of a cantonment town since birth I was aware that in every cantonment there were some old buildings well known for being haunted. My father often used to talk about 'Robert Barrack'

in Lansdowne Cantonment in North India where large number of officers and men of the Garhwal Rifles who stayed overnight had testified about their friendly encounter with the spirit of a certain Capt. Robert who had died inside the barrack during the British rule.

"Kon hai oye" (who is that), I said scared but determined. The reply came in the form of a huge punch across my face and I started bleeding from the nose. Ironically the punch even though painful came as some sort of relief as it made me certain that my invisible companion was a human being and not a ghost. I knew even Punjabi ghosts do not use four letter words and in any case the voice I heard was most certainly human and not of a ghost. "Oye mainu maar da kyaun hai oye" (why the hell are you thrashing me), I said now that I was convinced that I was dealing with a human being just like me with no extraordinary power or strength ghosts are supposed to have. What followed was more beating. After the person had completely tired himself he left the cell shouting threats and abuses like a mad man. He had hit me with his bare hands and with what seemed like an iron rod all over the body. I was bleeding from nose and mouth with multiple cuts on my face. My arms and legs were swollen and my wrist had become so stiff with pain that I could hardly move it. As he walked out he said, "ai ta tu nikka ja trailer vaikhya hai. Asli filam ta tainu raat vich vikhavangae. Pailan tu roti shoti kha le ohde vaad fir tere naal mulaqat hoyegi insha Allah." (This is just a small trailer I have shown you. The real film will be shown when we meet again at night. First you have your grub, we'll meet again afterwards).

Just after the ghost man left, a guard came shouting asking me to pick up 'apna khana' (your food). I had not yet recovered from the effects of the massive beating the ghost man had given me and was lying bleeding and bruised on the floor. Because of the blindfold I couldn't see in which direction the food plate was lying. When he saw that I was not getting up, the guard first prodded me with a stick as if I was an animal in a cage and then started beating the enamel plate with the same stick shouting, "eddar oye khotiye eddar" (look here you donkey, its lying here). To avoid further prodding by the stick which was getting more and more hurtful I got up with great difficulty and started running my hand over the contents in the plate. It had two chapattis and a loaf of meat with a large bone – larger than

normally found in mutton, chicken or other meats commonly consumed in India. I instantly had a gut feeling that it was beef and in shock and disgust dropped the plate. I had been brought up in a vegetarian family and as a Hindu beef was simply ruled out from my diet. I abhorred the very idea of having touched a piece of meat that was obtained after slaughtering a cow venerated by every Hindu as an alternate mother.

"Chal apna khana kha chheti," (hurry up and finish the food), I heard the ghost man thundering but didn't respond. Oye apna khana kyon nahin khanda hai oye," he thundered again finishing the sentence with four letter words directed towards me. When I still kept mum, the ghost man asked the guard to open the door of the cell and barged in charging towards me like a bull. He kept on hitting me and repeating in frenzy his question why I wasn't eating the food given to me. "I can't eat as I am not well" I said, "cant' you see what a bad shape I am in because of beating by you. Can any one eat even a morsel in such a state." "OK" said the ghost man, "in that case just put this loaf of meat in your mouth only once and swallow just a fraction even if you don't want to eat the whole of it." He started forcibly pushing the loaf down my throat. From some of our relatives who had to migrate from the Pakistani Punjab at the time of partition I had heard horrifying tales of how some of them were made to forcibly eat cow's flesh by their muslim neighbors to convert them to Islam. What was heartening was that for every such tale of horror there could be ten stories of how their Muslim friends saved the lives and properties of some of them and how their friendship has survived the partition of India even after a quarter century.

When I threw up what the ghost man had tried to push down my throat, he became furious and started thrashing me mercilessly accusing me of having lied all along by claiming to be a musalman whereas in reality I was a kafir sikh. "Tell me your real name now," he was screaming. "You can't be Mohammad Salim as you are not even a musalman. If you are a musalman why don't you eat this loaf of beef." He was now being quite clear and open about what was being offered to me as food. When I told him that I was a musalman but at the same time I was also a vegetarian who didn't like eating meat be it beef or mutton or whatever he asserted that a muslim can never be a vegetarian. I had no intention of giving in

and confronted him with the basic question of where exactly was it written in the holy Koran that a muslim has to compulsorily be a meat eater. (In fact some of my muslim friends in the school had told me that the holy Koran no where enjoins meat eating as being compulsory for a muslim and that they did have some close relatives who were strict vegetarians. The ghost man brushed aside my query about the holy Koran by simply stating that he was a soldier and not a maulvi who would know the verses of the holy Koran by heart. His training, he clarified, was that if a person refuses to eat meat he can't be a muslim and one who refuses to eat beef has got to be a Sikh kafir. "I am giving you a last chance," said the ghost man and asked me to take the beef in howsoever-small quantity to prove that I was a Muslim. The Islamic teachings shared by some of my Muslim friends came in handy once again for me. "The flesh of a cow is 'marz' (disease), its milk 'shafa' (medicine) and its ghee 'daawat' (feast)," I said, "and this has been stated not by any kafir but by an Egyptian Islamic scholar. On what basis you are saying that any one who refuses to eat beef has got to be a kafir." The ghost man didn't seem impressed and had perhaps already made up his mind. He left pushing me and dashing my head against the iron grill of the door of the cell and threatening, "hun mainu pata chal gaya, mai tainu vekhanga haramjade kafir." (Now I have come to know and I will see you, you kafir bastard). I was gradually losing the calm I had managed to maintain through the course of the day and was nervously awaiting the happenings that lay in store for the night.

Span of the day seemed to have become extraordinarily short as night fell sooner than expected. I heard the footsteps of some persons entering the cell. They must have been at least three persons I guessed. One of them handed me what seemed like a pair of trousers made of some synthetic cloth. (Nylon, terylene and stretchlon were popular in those days). Asking me to change the pants 'as I had to go for an interview with 'vadde saabji' (the big boss) he sounded incredibly sweet I knew though that it was artificial. He helped me in the change over after which I was marched up to a room where the mysterious 'vadde saabji' was already present. In addition there were 2 or three other persons inside. "Ai ta kise bhale ghar da padhya likhya munda lagda hai" (he appears to be an educated young man from some decent family), the big boss said and ordered his men to make me seated.

"Sit down son, here is the chair for you." As I started running my hand to find the chair because of the blindfold, the boss commanded his men to guide me to the chair. The person who had given the new trousers to me caught my hand and guided me to the armrest of the chair asking me to sit down comfortably.

As I sat I felt my bottoms had been set on fire. Oh my God! I said to myself, they are making me sit on an electric hot plate and tried to get up. My helper was standing nearby and he forced me back on the hot plate. This was too much and clearly far beyond what I had been trained to expect during the interrogation should that eventuality at all come by. The synthetic fabric of which the pants so kindly gifted to me by the helper burnt instantly and stuck deep inside my burnt flesh. It was horrible. I started crying hysterically and felt like I was going to die shortly. The boss told his men to let me get up from the 'chair' and not force me on to it. "Now tell me your real name and the purpose of your visiting Pakistan," he asked. I had hardly uttered 'Mohammad' and was yet to complete by adding 'Salim' when the boss said, "kursi utte" (on the chair please). The helpers again pushed and pinned me down to the 'chair' (read hot plate). This game of musical chairs continued for some time. I cried pathetically but now I was fully prepared to die rather than give up. 'Mohammad salallaho alaho wale wasallam,' I would chant the name of the holy prophet with due protocols prescribed in the scripture and at the end add 'Salim' as if I had become possessed by some extra terrestrial power and would occasionally also recite the kalama. "Ya Mohammad," "Ya Rasul allah," "Ya Allah khair," "La ilah illillah Mohammad ur Rasuillah," my chants had become as frenzied as they were frequent.

Not that my tormentors were any less. They too were doing their job unfazed by my efforts of religious blackmailing. "Kursi utte", "lat", "chittar" (on the chair again, boot, kick), the boss was yelling out commands to his men as if he was an accomplished music director guiding the members of the ensemble and his men were following the direction deftly. My inability to touch and feel the wounds or see them because of my hands being tied and the blindfold being on added to the pain and the overall feeling of discomfort.

My physical stamina proved a poor companion for my mental conviction. My

chanting of the Kalama and the name of the holy prophet started getting feeble and finally stopped. I fell down motionless even though I wasn't fully unconscious. The interrogators lifted me up and helped me change from the pants to a salwar. The synthetic fabric had dug deep in to the flesh leaving gashing wounds after it was pulled out. A person being addressed as Doctor saab by others was asked to see my condition. He applied some lotion on the wounds and told that there was nothing to worry even if the whole exercise was repeated allover again. "Ainu maran te main nahin dewanga enni guarantee hai" (I will not let this fellow die, that much I can guarantee), was his final verdict and lasting assurance.

As I could not walk I was carried on a stretcher and lodged in a slightly bigger cell. The torture was repeated continuously for three nights and the interrogation veered from my real name and identity to the contacts I had in Pakistan. Occasionally I was shown some photographs and asked to identify the persons. I denied, as I had never seen them before. The person who used to force and pin me down to the hot plate told me some names and asked me to state before the boss that those were the names of the persons seen in the photographs. He assured me that he would keep the hot plate disconnected from the electrical mains if I did as he asked me to do. From his talk I could gather that the photograph also had some of the personnel of the same unit and the man was trying to settle personal scores with some of his own colleagues using me as his tool. I declined the offer referring to some verses of the Holy Koran that forbade a Muslim from giving false evidence before any court.

12

The Shahi Quila

The 'hotplate treatment' had left me a complete physical wreck though my morale wasn't down in spite of every possible trick tried by the tormentors, day in and day out. Making me put on trousers made of synthetic cloth so that the pieces of fabric got stuck deep inside the flesh as a result of burning and pain aggravated, keeping hands and feet tied continuously and not removing the blindfold so that I could neither see nor feel the gashing wounds that kept my entire consciousness under incessant inflammation and the continuous taunts and abuses at times accompanied by the guards, sentries or other passersby spitting in my face without any provocation from me were perhaps all aimed at breaking my nerve. The interrogators were not interested in knowing the truth beyond forcing me to confess my Indian identity. If they could achieve this they thought there would be no problem in making me agree to any other half truth or untruth they desired. Apart from a fake name and identity for myself they wanted me to identify some persons from a bunch of photogrqaphs they showed me and affirm that they were working for Indian intelligence agencies. Surprisingly, most of such persons were not only their own compatriots but also their own colleagues in the FIU or the police. So much about the feeling of camaraderie amongst ground level workers of the intelligence and security agencies of Pakistan! I found it ironical.

"An interrogator pursues the trail of truth like a blood hound," I had read in one of the many books I used to read on spying in my days of crushes on the profession. Our Pakistani interrogators seemed to be just the opposite and pursuing the trail of untruths and compel me to be their henchman in the process. My mother who was a simple housewife with modest level of formal education had taught us some simple home truths. One of these was that you can never know another person's truth if you have no regard for truth yourself. Here were our Pakistani brethren

wanting to know my truth and at the same time persuading, forcing and even torturing me to tell lies that they thought would suit their petty, personal vested interests. I wonder if their mothers didn't teach them what my mother had taught me or whether they had forgotten what they might have learnt as little children.

I must have languished in that condition with severe burn injuries on my bottoms, hands and feet tied and eyes blindfolded for nearly a week. In fact I had started losing track of time because of the stunning effect of the torture on my mind but I still had been able to retain the awareness that my mental faculties and physical capabilities were falling rapidly. I also had the mental alertness to understand that I needed to put in some extra efforts to keep count of the days of my misery just in case I survived the ordeal and decided to tell the tale of my woes to my own country men and to my Pakistani brethren from whom we were separated by quirk of fate or vicious scheming by our colonial masters. I had therefore etched 18th September, 1966 – the date on which I was captured by the FIU at Kasoor bus stand along with Gulzar - and simply added up the days spent in a particular lockup or a quarter guard based on which I used to calculate the day and month coinciding with my shifting from one hell hole to another. When therefore on a cool but lazy morning I was asked by the guards to march up to a waiting vehicle I quickly started to calculate what date and month of the year it might be. "Le chal vai ki naanv hai tera", the guard came and started taunting, "Mohammad Salim ta tu ho nahin sakda kyon ke tu hai ta pakka kafir sardar eendia da. Hun jadon ajj raati teri khidmat hoyegi te tu appe bol payega vai tu kaun hai." (Come get ready you, what's your name, I know you can't be Mohammad Salim because I am sure you are a kafir Sikh from India. Tonight when you are serviced I am sure you will on your own tell the truth about who you are.) Because of preoccupation with the mental maths for calculating the date and month, I ignored the taunts and started following the guard mechanically. I guessed it could be 19th or 20th October 1966.

Unlike on other occasions this time the waiting vehicle turned out to be a truck and not jeep. A couple of guards lifted me up and tossed me in the air as if they were loading a gunny bag or a bundle of some commodity. I fell down on the floor of the truck with a thud and the burn wounds still quite raw seemed to have

exploded. Before I could cry I felt as if I had fallen on top of another person who already formed part of the cargo. I was immediately reminded of the ghost man who had silently bashed me up before I was served a meal of beef and roti in the cell where I was shifted after the brief friendly stint with my Baluch friends and started shivering like a dry leaf. "Kaun hai oye, ki gall hai," (Who is it? What's the matter) I heard the man on whom I had fallen speak feebly. It sounded like music to my ears and in a jiffy I forgot all the pain and all the misery I had been passing through ever since the FIU personnel had rounded up us. It was Gulzar, my friend, philosopher and guide whom I had already presumed dead because of what the Kasoor SHO had told me in the lockup on the night of September 18 1966. My first reaction was to scream with joy and hug Gulzar but in a split second the spy in me took charge and I decided to simply keep quiet, as this could be one of the tricks by our captors to get to know our association and also our identity. Knowledge of Gulzar's presence – in fact his being alive – proved to be a balm to me as I had started thinking only about him forgetting my burn injuries or the pain they caused. Gulzar too didn't speak anything further. After all, the spy in him was no less competent and professional.

As the truck moved I guessed that there were some other persons on board in addition to Gulzar and I. It kept moving on the road for a long time but I didn't want to calculate the distance it might have covered because I knew that they might be simply hovering on the same road just to throw us off our guess. The acoustic expertise developed recently by me as a matter of necessity to fight out the handicaps imposed by the blindfold suggested that we were on the same road for quite sometime. At last the truck stopped and the cargo was off-loaded. For the first time since we were captured the blindfolds were removed soon after we were thrown or pushed down from the truck. I counted that including me there were eight of us in the truck. All were lined up and lo and behold my guess was correct. Gulzar was alive though not kicking and was standing in line. So was Bhimsen, the person who befriended my elder brother only to come close to me and motivate me to work for the MI. There were some others whom I had known as MI operatives or had at least seen in the MI office at Jullundur. Each one of us had spotted the other but no one uttered a word or established eye contact.

Perhaps each one had suspected that the line up together might be a strategem by the Pakistanis to see if because of the element of surprise we loosen our guard and spontaneously say some thing that could establish our nexus and lead them to our true identity.

Standing guard to the captives were scores of persons in Pakistani police uniform. Outnumbering the uniformed personnel were some others in civvies. The senior most person in the police uniform was a sub-inspector of police. "Gal suno oye haramiyon" (Listen you bastards), the SI shouted in chaste Punjabi deliberately made to sound harsh, on top of his voice, "we don't bring petty crooks here as the place is meant only for big bastards ('haramaan'). We have some information on what big 'haramaans' you all are but let me tell you that the treatment that awaits you here is so effective that you either speak out here or never ever as in the event of your keeping silent you will be turned into a dead body." "And yes I forgot to tell you," he continued, "In this 'shahi quila' I have seen even dead bodies rising up with folded hands and beseeching our chawdhary sahab to stop thrashing." He then paused for a while and added, "oye haramaan puchhoge nahin ai chowdhary sahab kaun hai. Koi gal nahin na puchcho, raati appe pata chal jauga." (Won't you chaps ask, who is chpowdhry sahab? OK, never mind you will come to know that tonight only.)

Each one of us was given some tea and two blankets and escorted by plainclothes men to the cells in the basement of the fort. As could be expected the cell was small, dark and dingy. The ceiling was so low that I could hardly stand erect. It had a small door fitted with massive iron bar grills, perhaps dating back to the early 16th century when the cells might have been used to incarcerate an assortment of unfortunate souls from rebellious sons of the emperors' concubines aspiring to ascend the throne, to petty cooks suspected of having surreptitiously added poison to the delicacies meant for the royal palette. Just near the door there was a small earthen pitcher (Ghara) filled with ice-cold water up to the brim. (In fact earthen pitchers are used only during summers and not winters because even if you fill it with warm water it becomes pleasantly cool within minutes at the peak of summer season.) The very idea of drinking or using the water kept in an earthen pitcher during winters is enough to make one feel the chill and here

the pitcher was filled with ice-cold water every morning. Next to the pitcher was a makeshift commode for answering the call of nature. It wasn't water borne – it couldn't be expected either - and used to stink most of the time as a sweeper would come to clean it escorted by a policeman only once in twenty four hours. The walls, floor and ceiling were all damp and stinky. Out of the two blankets provided by the captors we had full liberty of using one for a mattress and the other to cover ourselves to fight the vagaries of the cold weather or doing without the mattress and using both to take care of the cold. Either way the cold was sure to become more oppressive and unbearable. I told the escort that two thin blankets provided by them might not be sufficient to ward off the cold. "Don't you worry," he said with a glint in his eyes, "It is just a matter of 2-3 days and you won't need any blanket. After all, a dead body needs a blanket only to cover itself and not to keep warm." The person tried to elaborate with a mischievous, sadistic smile that he had been on duty guarding these cells for quite some time and hadn't seen any one alive after two or at the most three sessions with 'chowhary sahab' unless of course good sense prevailed over the kafirs and they told the truth or embraced Islam. I felt nervous but pretended to ignore his unsolicited and chilling warnings. What was clear was that these barracks were meant predominantly for Indian detainees who were commonly addressed as 'sikhs'or 'kafirs' by the men of the Pakistani establishment.

I had heard and also read about the Shahi Quila of Lahore as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Lahore. Ironically I had once even asked Gulzar if during our stay in Lahore we could visit it and Gulzar had promised to take me around after the mission was accomplished. "Pehlan kam ta hoye, sair sapate vi hojaangay" (Let the work be over first, sight seeing can wait), he had said some what admonishingly. Is this the place people want to come all the way from Europe and America to see, I wondered? It was much later that I learnt that the fort was as large as the mind of a human being where there are always some corners that no one can see and our cells were exactly in one such corner about which few persons outside the core of Pakistani establishment were aware. For the rest of the world this part of the fort simply didn't exist. (After my repatriation I have been told that similar cells also exist in Delhi's Red Fort.)

For three days nothing happened. I had started getting used to the routine. In the morning the pitcher would be filled with water. Shortly afterwards a sweeper escorted by a policeman would come to clean the commode. This would be followed by yet another policeman who would slide two buns and half a mug of tea past the iron grills. Each one would come and go back without uttering a single word or acknowledging the nervous 'salam walequm' I would offer them by way of my respectful greeting. Occasionally they would return my greeting with a rude snub, "chupp oye bhen**** sikh. Salam walequm da puttar banya firda hai" (shut up you sister fucker sikh bloody son of salam walequm.) While daytime was marked by the silence of the grave, nights were filled with ghoulish wailings and screams from somewhere just above the cells. The guards would say that the screams were coming because of beating, as part of interrogation as just above the cell was the interrogation chamber. From the shrieks it was evident that the beating must be quite severe and ghastly. Perhaps as part of the strategy the guards would often try to scare me by saying that the fellows whose cries were heard seemed to be lucky as they were at least alive. "Oye assi ta ai vaikhya hai ki jede bande ne chowdhry saab de samne jaban nahin kholi au phir kade jaban kholan joga hinahin rainda. Janda banda hai te andi hai matti. Hoon tu apna faisla karley vai jabaan kholni ya fir vapas mayyat aani." (What we have often seen is that a person either opens his mouth before chowdhary saab or his mouth becomes shut for ever. We have seen living beings entering the interrogation chamber but only dead bodies coming out of it. Now you decide for yourself whether you want to open up or you want to come out only as a dead body.) Whatever the guards said might be motivated but it wasn't untrue, as I had myself seen detainees being marched up towards the interrogation chamber with hands tied behind and blindfolded but at the time of return none was seen walking. Every one was carried on stretcher. I used to feel scared but didn't reveal, as it would not have solved any problem. I was nevertheless keen to know what kind of character the 'chowdhry saab' would be.

My turn came on the fourth day. I had hardly finished the tea and bun meal when 3-4 persons barged into the cell. Two of them started tying my hands while the third one put the blindfold across my eyes. They then started pushing and

shouting abuses at the same time. The blindfold was removed after I reached inside the chamber. There were 6-7 persons in plain clothes. They were all standing making a circle round me. All were well built and hefty looking. One of them with thick long mustache and the physique of a wrestler appeared to be exceptionally cruel and unscrupulous. I guessed this could be the infamous chowdhry saab. The room was dimly lit with just a low wattage bulb hanging loose from the ceiling. At a little distance from the bulb was a piece of rope dangling from a hook fixed in the ceiling. One of the walls had a large number of nails with the sharper ends jutting out. While most of the nails just jutted out, a few were used for keeping some lashes made of leather and some ropes on them. There was only one chair in the room occupied by a person wearing Pakistani police uniform, sporting the rank of an Inspector. As I stood in the center of the circle made by plainclothes men every one including the Inspector and the person I had suspected of being chowdhry saab was staring silently at me. They then started exchanging glances with each other and smiling, making me feel embarrassed, sheepish and guilty for no particular reason.

Not knowing what to do I lowered my eyes and started looking down. Everyone around burst into laughter and some started clapping. "Haan ji chowdhry ji Bismillah karo" (Yes chowdhry ji please start in the name of Allah, who is most compassionate and merciful), the inspector gave his command. The person simply pounced on me, kicking, punching and shoving around. He ended by giving a sudden powerful push in the direction of the wall that had the nails with their sharper ends jutting out of it. Because the push came suddenly I couldn't take care and my head banged against the nails some of which pierced into my face and forehead. It was unbearable. I felt as if burning cinders had been smeared all over my face. I stood there stunned. "Na dainyam na palayanam" I once again recited the verse from the Bhagvad Gita silently within and shouted, "Shame on you. Are you a musalman? You commit such atrocities on a fellow human being and say you are doing it in the name of Allah, the most compassionate and the most merciful!" "Commit whatever sins you want to commit," I continued, "but don't make a mockery of the sacred chant of Bismillah-e- Rahaman-e-ur-Rahim. You will burn in hellfire till eternity if you do that." The guards used to narrate the

horrifying details of Chowdhryji's exploits with a view to scare me but I discovered that its effect on me was just the opposite. If I am sure to die, I said to myself, let me be bold and face the risk with dignity rather than suffering death and indignity both. In any case I had nothing to lose except the miserable life that had little else than hands and feet tied and the eyes blindfolded.

What I didn't realize was that the persons I was up against were hardly Muslims. In fact they were hardly human beings. They were simply hired assassins and mercenaries, in no way different from the contract killers of the under world. The fact that they enjoyed the duly formalized patronage of the State could not alter their basic character. I was trying to appeal to their Islamic conscience but the scant regard they had for Islam became clear shortly afterwards when I realized that almost everyone present in the chamber was reeking of liquor.

"Naun dass apna" (Tell me your name), Chowdhry ji started the interrogation. The moment I said Mahammad Salim, he gave a hard slap. The other questions asked repeatedly were, address in India, date and place of crossing into Pakistan, places visited in Pakistan and details of contacts in Pakistan. (The last question appeared to be most important, as later on I was repeatedly offered amnesty if only I could agree to a few names suggested by the interrogators as my contacts in Pakistan.) Afterwards when I had developed a network of my own in the jail, I also learnt that the names suggested by the interrogators were either innocent neighbors with whom the interrogators had their petty ego hassles or their own colleagues or some erstwhile operatives of the Pakistani agencies whom the senior officers considered to be a nuisance because they had started demanding their full share of payment out of the secret funds which more often than not were being used to finance the shopping sprees of relatives and wives of the senior officers.

Not satisfied with my answers Chowdhry saab and his team thrashed me in every conceivable manner. It continued for about half an hour. When I fell down they asked me to standup and answer their queries all over again. I could not stand as they had hit me all over my body including on my head. My face was badly bruised because of the dashing against the sharp nails. After waiting for sometime they poured some water over my face and head and on seeing that

even this could not revive me I was carried back to the cell on a stretcher like most others. I kept lying on the floor of the cell and when the policeman came with the usual two buns and half a mug of tea for dinner, he thought I had died because I didn't getup to pickup the mug even after he kept calling for a long time. "Oye e sikh ta mar gaya" (This sikh seems to have died), he started shouting nervously. The cell was opened and the crowd that had gathered helped me getup and hold the buns and the tea mug in my hands. The sympathy they seemed to have shown proved tobe short-lived as the moment they realized that I wasn't dead they again started admonishing and abusing, "Kyaun nakhre karda hai oye kafir di aulad" (Don't throw tantrums you son of a kafir.)

The interrogation continued for a couple of days. I had perhaps suffered some internal injuries resulting in complete loss of appetite. I also felt that I was having some kind of internal bleeding (haemorrhage) as occasionally I would vomit blood and see traces of blood even in the saliva. The level of my physical energy had dropped sharply. My face became completely pale and the overall feeling of inexplicable discomfort left no doubt in my mind that I wasn't going to remain alive for long. My heart went out to my parents; brothers, sister and friends back home in Jullundur. I had suddenly started missing everything that wasn't around and simply wanted to reach out to tell my tale of woes to those whom I considered to be my own before death embraced me and wiped my story out completely. I was lying brooding in my cell one night when I heard the sound of the iron grills. Perhaps the door was being opened slowly and someone walking in cautiously making sure his footsteps weren't heard. I thought it must be a night of another visit to the interrogation chamber. Instead of feeling nervous or scared I felt repulsed and disgusted. "Oye tussi mainu maar kyaun nahin dende," I said, "Ik laash de utte julam karke twahnu ki milda hai. Oye rabb da khauf karo oye jalimon. Onai twahnun twahde julmaan di saja jarur deni hai." (Why don't you fellows kill me? What do you gain by committing atrocities on a dead body? Don't you have fear of God in your mind? He is sure to punish you for all the atrocities you are committing on me.

I lay crying deliriously and waiting to be lifted up, tied, blindfolded and pushed out of the cell to be taken to the interrogation chamber but there was a surprise

in store. I felt someone leaning tenderly over me and trying to whisper something in my ear. First I thought I must be dreaming or because of physical and nervous weakness getting hallucinations. I was wrong. It was no hallucination. The person trying to speak to me was ASI Malik Mohammad Akram of Pakistani police whom I had seen on guard duty a couple of times earlier. "Ki gall hai, boht taklif horayi hai" (Are you in great pain?), he asked with a soothing touch of kindness that I had by now forgotten. I stretched my hand to see if he was carrying his service revolver and pleaded with him to do me a favor by shooting me dead. I couldn't reach the weapon but folded my hands in a beseeching gesture and mumbled, "Janab bas ainni meharbani kar deo." "Tu marada hai ya jinda renda hai mainu koi matlab nahin hai. Mai ta ik police officer di haisiyat naal apni duty karda haan. Ohde wich koi kotahi nahin hon dyanga. Haan meri ik duty insaniyat de hawale naal vi hai aur o duty ai hai ki tere varga jawan banda bemaut na marya jave." (As a police officer it is my duty to ensure that you remain in custody. But as a human being I also have another duty and that is to see that a young man of your age doesn't die unnatural or untimely death.) I felt utterly confused about his motive or objective. "Will you do as I tell?", he asked. I thought he might have come to ask me to confess and get done with the whole problem but I was once again in for a surprise. "I know a two line prayer dedicated to the mother goddess. My mother says that if a person chants it with faith and devotion all his troubles may vanish."

Now there was no scope for any surprise, I thought, it was sure a ploy to get to confirm my Indian identity. "Tauba, Tauba," I said trying to pull up maximum possible feelings of repulsion on my face, "ai ta kufra hai, ainu Koran majid wich shirak kahya gaya hai, Ya Allah khair." (God forgive me. What you are suggesting is pure and simple infidelity. The holy Koran defines it as blasphemy). ASI Akram was visibly disgusted. "I have very little time. If any of my constables sees me talking like this to you I will not only lose my job, but, will perhaps be lodged in the adjacent cell and left to die of the chowdhry treatment," he said snubbing me for suspecting his intentions. "Now quickly listen to the verse and try to memorise it. My mother has told me that it works wonders and solves all problems." He started uttering the magic verse in extremely hushed voice, "JAI JAG JANANI

KARUNA SWARUPE : JAI JAG JANANI HEY DURGE BHAVANI." (Victory to thee o universal mother; thou art compassion personified.) "Listen you doubting fool, my mother was a Hindu by birth and her Hindu name was Shanti Devi. In the tumultuous days of the partition she was married to a Muslim and converted to Islam. Before conversion she was a great devotee of the Divine Mother. After conversion she gave up all Hindu practices except her devotion to the mother Goddess. My father is a devout Muslim and such a wonderful human being that he never interfered with my mother's decision to continue to worship the Divine Mother. I don't want to discuss whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim but I have heard from your interrogators that you are an Indian. Many times during night duty I have seen you lying on the floor in a pitiable condition, some times with your hands joined together in the manner the Hindus do while saying their prayers. Out of sheer pity for you I asked my mother if the short prayer she offers to mother Goddess as panacea for all ills can be of some use in your case and she told me to ask you to chant it. She is sure that it shall protect your life and minimize the pain and suffering you are undergoing." Before wrapping up, ASI Malik Mohammad Akram once again made it clear that because of this incident I should not have any misgivings about his devotion to duty. "I have done my duty as a human being but given half a chance I shall not hesitate to do my duty as an officer of the Pakistani police and even shoot you if you try to take any liberties and break the discipline expected of a detainee."

I memorised the verse instantly. (In fact I still recite it particularly when I am faced with some difficulties.) I felt overwhelmed with the kindness shown by the ASI and his mother and started imagining how she might be looking. I conjured up a face that I imagined as the face of ASI Akram's mother and wanted to touch her feet as a mark of my respect to her. I conjured up another face – the face of a male – that I imagined was Akram's father and wanted to touch his feet as well. After all he too was no less kind and noble a soul. The pictures I conjured up soon got superimposed with the pictures of my own parents. Aren't all mothers equally nice and kind, I wondered? Hadn't my mother behaved exactly in the same manner as Akram's mother had done if I were in Akram's place and Akram in mine? Imagining that my mother and Akram's were just like sisters I mumbled subconsciously,

"peri penna khala." There was nothing strange or surprising in what I mumbled. Before partition, when Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims shared close neighborhood it was common for the Muslim children to show their respect to the mothers of their Hindu friends by touching their feet, addressing them as 'chachi' or 'mausi'. The Hindu children would likewise address their Muslim friends mothers as 'khala'or 'fufi'. Pre-partition Indian society was an ideal example of peaceful co-existence with absolute respect for each other's social and religious mores.

I didn't quite notice when immersed in the myriad thoughts I fell asleep. After coming to the shahi quila I had a sound sleep for the first time. This perhaps was the beginning of the miracles Akram had attributed to his mother's wonder prayer to the Divine Mother.

13

Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memon and His Style of Voluntary Confession

It was now almost a week since I last visited the interrogation for those nightly ordeals. I had started getting accustomed to life in a secluded corner of the Shahi Quila. Peace suddenly seemed to have dawned as an unexpected blessing from the heavens silently. The two square meals of two buns and half a mug of tea each was no less than a lavish treat in some classy eating joint of Lahore's famous Anarkali Bazaar. For one full week I was not subjected to any physical torture. The physical weakness and mental depression were considerably reduced and I had started looking once again as vibrant as a young man of 20 should. Isn't it a miracle? Isn't the miracle directly attributable to the short and sweet two lines of prayer ASI Akram had so affectionately gifted me? I would often wonder lying in the cell. Occasionally my feeling of peace and tranquility would be broken by pathetic cries of invisible faces who were perhaps undergoing the Chowdhry treatment in the chamber just above. On such occasions I wished I could reach those unfortunate souls and whisper in their ears the same prayer my brother Akram had whispered in my ear that dull and desolate night.

It must have been after a week since I had started coming to terms with life that a posse of uniformed men from Pakistan police landed in the cell. I was asked to quickly take bath and change over to a neatly ironed pair of salwar-kamij. "Chal vai chheti tyar hoja tainu sadde naal chalna hai" (Get ready soon you have to accompany us), the inspector accompanying the police team asked me hurriedly. A million thoughts crossed my head. Am I being shifted to another interrogation facility? Is my custody going to be given to some new agency? Am I being taken to the border to be freed? I had host of niggling questions without answers. "Kitthe le challe ho" (where are you taking me), I asked the policemen trying to

hide nervousness and look normal. They maintained a studied silence making me feel painfully ignored.

I was put on board a waiting police van ordinarily meant for ferrying under-trials from jails or lockups to the courts. I was surprised as it was a Friday, the day on which all government establishments including courts remained closed in Pakistan. Apart from the driver and the escort team, I was the sole occupant of the van. It drove straight to the District Court complex. The policemen took me to the chamber of the duty magistrate. The nameplate at the entrance declared it to be the chamber of Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memone. The police inspector handed over to the Magistrate a sheet of paper that he claimed was my confessional statement. The Magistrate asked me to sign it. When I told him that I wanted to go through it, the Magistrate seemed upset and irritated. "This is in Urdu, you kafir Sikh, how will you read it," the Magistrate wanted to know. When I told him I could read Urdu as much as any Pakistani could, he couldn't hide his anger and gesticulated with his hand as if he wanted to slap. "It will be handed over to you only if you are ready to sign it. It won't be given to you for reading," the Magistrate thundered. I was equally adamant and refused to sign without reading. The Magistrate offered to read it out to me. The opening line said, "I Amrik Singh a citizen of India…."

I was shocked. "Who is this Amrik Singh," I asked. "You; who else", the Magistrate replied promptly and added; "Now stop this vakalat baji (Advocacy) and sign it." "I shall sign it if you force me" I said, "I have no option but to leave myself to my fate if sitting on the Judge's chair you behave like a police man, but let me tell you janabewali (sir), I am not Amrik Singh." The Magistrate looked at the police inspector as if they were close personal friends and taunted him for not having 'managed' the detainee before marching in to his chamber. He then gave me a dirty vicious look and declared that every one who signs the statements in his chamber does so voluntarily. "Once a kafir like you even signed a statement confessing that he had actually died about a year back," " and mind you even that was a voluntary confession." "Buss panch minute thehr ja tera statement vi voluntary karande haan" (Just wait for five minutes and your statement also will become voluntary), he said gleefully joining the middle finger with the thumb of his right hand and rubbing the two together to produce a slow clapping sound.

He then turned to the Inspector and told him to take me back to shahi quila and return only when I agree that the statement is voluntary. "Jadon delivery haun valihoye na oss wele patient nu etthe lyawo ta koi gallban di hai. Ainuta halle labour pain vi shuru nahin hoya. Ainu vapas le ja te mada ja labor pain kar ke lya." (It is better if you bring the patient when delivery is about to take place. This chap hasn't yet got even the labor pains so take him back and bring him only when the pains have started.)

It was quite obvious that the magistrate far from being an objective and fair adjudicator was actually only a lengthened shadow of the police and the security agencies. It also became clear that because of total collusion with this particular Magistrate, the Police perhaps waited for marching up unfortunate souls like me to the Court only on Fridays so that an obliging duty Magistrate Mr. Faisal Tehseen Memone could be at their beck and call to sanctify all the atrocities and lies with his rubber stamp of judicial scrutiny. Those were the days when the electronic media was non-existent and Human Rights activists like Asman Jehangir or social organisations like the Eedhi Foundation were yet to arrive. The Inspector brought me back to the van. Once inside the van my hands and feet were tied and the blindfold put on. After barely 15-30 minutes drive I was offloaded and pushed into what felt like a dingy cell in an isolated place.

"Magistrate saab ne kehya hai aide halka ja labour pain karna hai" (The Magistrate has asked us to induce some labor pain to this fellow), I heard the inspector commanding someone. Soon after some 5-6 persons caught hold of me and hung me upside down. I felt my legs were tied with a piece of rope that could in turn be hanging lose from some hook fixed in the ceiling. The persons around suddenly pounced and in a few seconds I felt that every milimeter of my body was being hit with an assortment of instruments including rods, chains and whips. In between some hard slaps and punches also rained with equal ferocity. "Dass vai tera naun AmrikSingh Hai ki nahin," I heard the Inspector asking me in between the 'labor pain treatment' with unusual frequency. When I didn't respond to the question the Inspector asked his men to 'call Doctor saab.' I was immediately reminded of the doctor's presence at the time of 'hot-plate treatment' when he was being used by my tormentors only to reassure them that he won't let me die

even if the torture was repeated and started crying hysterically at the prospects of this particularly inhuman torture being repeated or continued any more. "Oye chup kar oye bhen*hod kafir, halle ta kuchh hoya hinahin hai aenj rola payijanda hai. Pahlan sanu kuchh karan ta de." (Oh you shut up you sister sucker infidel. Why are you creating a ruckus when we are yet to start our job. First at least let us do something).

I felt the rope being lowered a little and some persons reaching the string of my salwar to pull it down. The very next moment I felt as if a million atom bombs simply exploded inside me. Perhaps some chilly powder or something even more lethal and corrosive had been stuffed in my anus and mouth. They then started spinning me rapidly. I tried to muster all the courage to invoke the teaching of the Gita, "Na dainyam na cha palayanam," (neither pathos nor escapism) but felt that I was sinking and moving fast into the jaws of death. I didn't fear death. In fact very few persons on the Indian sub-continent fear death because of deep-rooted ethos of the idea of death being treated as nothing more than trivia common to all its natives irrespective of their religious faith, but why such a violent death at the young age of 20, I wondered and complained to God, Allah and Wahe Guru alike. Hanging upside down suspended from a rope with chilly powder or some such stuff shoved in the mouth and anus and the rope being given a spin after severe beating with rods, chains and rubber tubes is something not many people can endure for long. Apart from the physical pain your blood pressure shoots up because of the upside down position and the spinning motion makes you completely disoriented and giddy. Things become worse the moment you realize that the only medical expertise you have around is meant not for providing succor to you but for providing professionally sound (even if unethical) advice to the tormentors about the limits of physical endurance of their victim. The last hope for a victim of such atrocity in a civil society is the Judge but here I had already seen for myself the kind of relief Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memone was intending to provide to me.

It was under these utterly miserable conditions that I took my decision not to die such a violent and disgraceful death worse than a dog's. All along my days of incarceration I had braved the worst kinds of most inhuman torture and

unspeakable atrocities and maintained my faith in the MI. "MI de hath boht lambe ne. Pakistan de har shahr de wich sadde bande ne. Onanae thwahnu kisse kisam ditaklif nahin hon deni. Pahli gallta ae ve ki tussi kade phade javoge hinahin. Je phade vigaye te sadde bandyan nu phataphat khabar ho jau gi te o twahde lai vakil shakil sab kuchh intjamkaran gae. Ghabran di koi lor hi nahin hai. Twahdi puri tankhwah assi twahde ghar bhejange. (MI's hands are very long. We have our sources in every town in Pakistan. They will help you in case of any problem. Firstly you cannot be caught but even if you are caught our contacts will get the information quickly and arrange Lawyers etc. for you. There is nothing you have to worry about. We will also send your salary to your family members regularly) These are the kind of promises our instructors at the MI office in Jullundur had made to us.

I had maintained my faith in the MI's assurances and was confident they would honor their words. Every time they led us up this primrose path they wrapped up with a caveat. "Bass ik gall da dhyan Rkhna ke ai lafaz MI twahdi juban te na aave. Je MI da naun le ditta te oh de vaad assi twahde vaste kuchh nahin karna. Assi kah dyange vai sanu nain pata ai banda kaun hai. Naale twahde ghar wale lokyan nu vi ik dhela nahin dena." (Just keep in mind one thing. Never utter the word MI in that kind of a situation. If you utter this word we will disown you and won't give a penny to your family.)

I endured everything from the wily SHO of Kasoor to the crude attempts to forcibly feed me beef and the hotplate treatment with as much faith in God as in the MI's promises. While God answered my prayers every now and then, the MI turned out to be as elusive as a unicorn. With the horrors of the 'labor pain treatment' experienced that chilly Lahore morning I seemed to have reached the dead end in the tunnel. I decided to give myself away and get over the ordeal as early as possible. With my whole body feeling afire from within and scars of inhuman atrocities etched broad and deep in my mind I declared to my tormentors that I was willing to sign the confessional statement that I was Amrik Singh from India and whatever else I was required to declare and sign.

The police personnel complimented each other and brought me back to mother

earth by lowering the rope, untying and letting me stand on my feet instead of on the head. Some of them started condemning 'chodhry saab' for his incompetence accusing him of rising up the ladder of interrogators only through PR. It was obvious that as the star interrogator in the Shahi Quila he was kind of a superior among equals and his peers not only envied him but also aspired to replace him ironically by boasting that they could be better tormentors and worse human beings. What a travesty of human sensibilities indeed.

I was marched back to the van. The blindfold was removed only after I was seated in and all the windows panes were covered so that I had no idea whatsoever about the place where the inhuman torture was inflicted upon me. A glass of water was given to sprinkle on the face so I looked relatively fresh and normal. The police inspector almost my father's age looked unusually affectionate. "Oye kyaun befazul maar khadi oye kafira. Meagistrate saab the gall nahin mor da te ai sab kuchh hona hi nahin si. Allah da shukar kar jinda vach gaya. Nahin ta kei bande mar vi jande hain. Te sadda te ki janasi assi ta apni naukri kar rahey haan. Naale Magistrate sadde naal hai saanu ki fikar hai je tere varga ik kafir mar vi ja na si." (Why did you unnecessarily invite this thrashing you infidel. Had you agreed to the Magistrate's suggestion you would have escaped this ordeal. Thank God you are alive. I have seen many kafirs like you dying because of the thrashing. And mind you nothing would have happened to us because of your death. You have seen the Magistrate is with us and in any case we are doing our duty.)

Back in the court chamber, Magistrate Faisal Terhseen Memone was waiting. The Inspector offered him a smart salute and winking mischievously, announced that the 'patient was now ready to deliver.'

"So you can read Urdu," the Magistrate asked me. "Ji janabevali," (yes sir), I replied. "OK then take this piece of paper from the Inspector and read it out. Confirm to me that this is your voluntary confession. If you have any difficulty in confirming that, no problem, I'll send you once again with the inspector to induce the right kind of labor pain. Don't hesitate, as I'll send you back as many times as you ask for. Don't you worry," Magistrate finished a monologue and turned his attention to the book he might have started reading to fight boredom after he dispatched

me for his peculiar brand of justice based on 'labor pain treatment.'

When I was returning to court after the 'labor pain treatment,' I was toying with the idea of taking at least one more chance to represent to the Magistrate against what had been done to me by the Inspector and his henchmen. I still had some faith that irrespective of his individual temperament and close association with the police personnel he was after all, trained as a judge and there could sure be some trace of judiciousness in his conscience. My hopes were completely dashed after I heard him threatening to keep sending me for similar treatment as long as I didn't agree to sign on the dotted lines. My physical condition too was weak and gloomy. By now I also had lost whatever hopes I had from the MI. In a nutshell, I felt completely hopeless and resigned. Seeing me standing numbed and looking lost, the Magistrate passed on a few sheets of paper and asked me to sign. As I was signing he sarcastically asked me what my name was. "Amrik Singh,' I said completely devoid of any feelings. "Ai shabash hai, Ai hoi na gall" (Well done, now things are fine), he said with a grin.

14

Central Jail Lahore

The papers signed by me were kept in an envelope that was sealed by one of the constables accompanying me and kept by the Magistrate as part of his record for the case. For the sake of the record the sealed envelope contained my 'confessional statement made voluntarily in the presence of a Magistrate.' According to the legal system inherited by both India and Pakistan from their common colonial masters-the British-a confession signed in the presence of a police officer becomes invalid as it may be extracted by the policemen through coercion, but if it is made in the presence of Magistrate it is considered voluntary as a Magistrate because of his training, temperament and the sanctity of the exalted position occupied by him in the criminal justice system is presumed to be fair, objective and above partisan interests. Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memone was a beneficiary of this legal fiction and I, its unfortunate victim. The Police Inspector obviously was the one to whom the last laugh rightfully belonged in the entire drama.

After the papers were signed by me Magistrate Memone and his friend the Police Inspector exchanged some jokes and loud laughter indicating the level of intimacy they enjoyed with each other. Towards the end of their casual conversation that I couldn't follow because of my physical and mental condition, I heard the Magistrate remark casually and apparently indicating his agreement with the inspector that I could be taken straight to the Central Jail. "Hoon ki lor hai shahi quile lejaan di, hoon te twahda kam ban gay ate ai sikh hoon undertrial ho gaya" (where is the need to take him back to shahi quila, take him straight to the Central Jail; now your job is done and this sikh has become an under-trial), I heard him tell the inspector. What a mockery of the system! I said to myself. I was apprehended by the FIU at the Kasoor bus stand more than a month ago and was taken from police stations

to quarter guards to the Shahi Quila. I was grilled by the Pakistani police, army, their security services and God knows which all agencies who inflicted the most inhuman torture on me. All along I had two hopes in my mind. First, that the MI shall come to my rescue through some of its local sources as was assured to us by every one from ustadji to CO saab and the oldman and second that some day when I get a chance to appear before a Magistrate I shall narrate my tale of woes before him and his judicial conscience shall definitely bring succor to me. My hopes from the MI had dimmed considerably after I was shifted to the Shahi Quila and today, Magistrate Memone had written an elaborate epitaph to my hope of relief from the Magistracy of Pakistan. I had no idea what exactly was written about me and my alleged crime in the records of the police and the court. I also had no idea under which law and in what capacity was I kept in custody and tortured all along these days. I nevertheless felt obliged to Magistrate Memone for making me aware-howsoever unwittingly- that now on I was an under-trial in the custody of the central Jail of Lahore.

The van was first taken to the Shahi Quila for some paper work that the Inspector wanted to complete. I was not allowed to get down eventhough I kept requesting that I had to collect my belongings. (The fact was that I had developed some kind of attachment to the cell and wanted to have a look at it just to bid it good-bye.) After the police completed the paper work I was driuven to the Lahore central jail. The first thing I noticed inside the jail was a hefty, wellbuilt person practicing lashing on a wooden frame called 'tik-tiki' in the local lingo, much the same way the cricketers do their net practice. The person practicing was actually one of the senior prisoners who volumteered his services for lashing those convicted to lashes in return for small favors from the jail administration, e.g. a richer diet as compared to other inmates and some coupons that could be exchanged for small purchases like beedis or cigarettes from the tuck shop within the jail premises. The volunteers, known as 'baint maar' were as much despised as dreaded by the other inmates.

I was still in the van when the inspector gave my papers to the jail staff who, after reading them called out the 'baint maar' who was practicing on the wooden frame. "Oye edhar aa oye pehlwan, inspector saab tere lai ik sikh nu le ke aye ne" (come

here wrestler, the Inspector has brought a Sikh for you), the jail staff called aloud. The 'bainnt maar' was all eyes and ears and started looking at the van. As I was taken down, the baint maar asked me to lie down on the belly. "Don't worry, this is the traditional refreshment ('nashta-pani') for every Sikh arriving in this jail" the 'baint-mar' said casually. The jail staffer who had called out the baint maar and two constables from the escort party pushed me down. As I fell on my belly, the baint maar started lashing me. He would take a small run up, jump and then strike with the lash (called patta) to make it more forceful as well as painful. A small crowd of some more inmates, the jail staff and the police team that accompanied me in the van gathered around and started counting each lash by shouting "ik", "doy" (one, two) as little children do to cheer up their teams during school sports. They counted upto five and started clapping and patting the baint maar on his back for the good job done. Blushing and boasting at once, the baint maar acknowledged the applause and said he won't feel tired if he were to go on lashing "these kafir Sikhs" all his life. "Kafir nu maran da lutaf hi kuchh hor hai" (Lashing the infidels gives me a unique pleasure), he declared before accepting a tumbler full of milk offered to him as instant reward by a jail staff.

After this 'traditional refreshment' I was locked in a small cell that was part of a barrack. Once again I had a pleasant surprise in store. My friend Gulzar was in the same barrack though in a separate cell. Early next morning a lumberdar (a senior inmate assigned sundry responsibilities by the jail administration) came to the barrack and asked me to accompany him for 'Mulehza' (interview) by the Jail Superintendent. It turned out to be quite a ceremony. The Jail superintendent appeared from a balcony like the Pope appearing in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. I was standing, my arms caught by two persons, one each on either side. The lumberdar read out my name and the charges I was facing on hearing which the Superintendent ordered a 'beddi' (bar fetter) to be brought and fixed between my legs. The order was complied with quickly. I started sobbing because of the humiliation and discomfort it caused. I could neither walk properly nor bend my leg because of the bar fetter. In the beginning I felt extremely upset and started having suicidal ideas but gradually I adjusted and came to terms with it.

Next morning when I was taken out of the cell I found that the entire barrack was reserved for 'sikhs' as all Indian detainees were called in Pakistani Jails. Apart from Gulzar I could see Bhim Sen, Madan Gopal, Munishwer Chander, Lahora (alias Pishora) Singh, Inderjeet Singh and and Sansari Lal, all of whom were MI operatives whom I had known personally. I was also given the sad news that one of our colleagues, Harmesh Kumar whom we had nick named Teddy had died of torture during interrogation in the 'shahi quila'. Another MI operative Om Prakash (from Amritsar) who had crossed over earlier was undergoing a 7 year sentence after being convicted under the Official Secrets Act of Pakistan. Om Prakash told us that all the Indian prisoners are assigned the work of 'jhadoo-pocha' (sweeping and mopping) in the jail premises. In the beginning it was difficult to do the job with the bar fetters on but gradually we all became accustomed to the chores.

The original building of Lahore Central Jail was very old but the Government of Pakistan had constructed a new building after demolishing the entire old structure except for a small portion that was kept intact. The portion that was preserved consisted of the cells in which Sardar Bhagat Singh was interred and the spot where Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were executed.

Our colleague Inderjeet Singh was the oldest amongst us and out of respect for his age we started addressing him as 'ustadji'. Another inmate, Om Prakash because of his longer experience in the jail became our guide giving us useful tips about how to keep the jail staff, lumberdars and the other (Pakistanis) inmates in good humor.

I had just started getting used to the jail life when one day the lumberdar came and informed that I was to be shifted to the Kasoor sub-jail.

15

Kasoor Sub Jail

When the lumberdar came to ask me to pack up for the sub-jail at Kasoor, I had just finished my mopping-sweeping duty and was pressing my legs to relieve the pain and stiffness caused due to the bar-fetters. It added to my feeling of discomfort because of the impending uprooting and the hassles generally involved in getting used to new surroundings. As I was being escorted out of the cell I saw my friend Gulzar also heading towards the 'deodhi' (the relatively large room in a prison through which all inmates have to pass at the time of arrival and departure.) I instantly understood that Gulzar too was coming along and felt somewhat relieved that I shall not be alone in the new surroundings.

It was the usual scene of the two 'Sikhs' packing their bags and marching up to the waiting rickety police van trying to adjust the bar fetters with one hand and with the other hand clutching to whatever meager belongings they were allowed to take along. The escort team crying out filthy abuses just because their charge happened to be a non-Pakistani and an Indian 'Sikh' at that. As we were passing by the 'baint-mar' who had lashed me with the whip on my arrival cried out to the escort wanting to know why the 'kaum' (nation) didn't give him a chance for the same 'khidmat' (service) when the 'kafir sikhs' departed from the prison. "Oye chup vikar hun pahlwan," the escort in charge said, "Sab kuchh jaanda hoya vi bakwas karda hai. Ai mayye doyon kafir ta takdir wale hain, nahin ta mayye jaande kadaun hain. Jaa te bhen**** mar jande ne te ja fir saal dar saaljailde andar hirehande nekafir jande kadaun hai. Tu ki matti nu vi kore marna chaunda hai dudh da bhukha." (O you shut you muscleman. You know very well that these two are lucky to be walking out. Otherwise these infidels hardly ever depart from the prison. They are either sentenced for life or go out only as dead bodies. Now just for the sake of that extra glass of milk do you want to flog even dead bodies.)

As I was afflicted with intense bouts of depression because of the pathetic condition in which I thought I had fallen due to sheer bad luck, I didn't pay full attention to the sick jokes being exchanged between the escort team and the 'baint-mar'. This was in a way good, as had I fully heard or understood the conversation between the two, I would perhaps have felt more depressed and downcast. While walking down in fetters and carrying my barest minimum belongings with great difficulty as head load I was recalling the respectable life I was used to since my birth back home in Jullundur Cantonment and sobbing silently over the bad days that had befallen me all of a sudden. What have I done to deserve this kind of treatment, and whom do I blame for my plight, I was wondering. Is it the false promises made by the MI staffers or the blind allurements by Bhimsen for motivating me to opt for a career based only on phantasm, or the dehumanized establishment of the Pakistani state who played foul and ruined my life? I was demoralized and remained totally benumbed throughout the journey from Lahore to Kasoor. Occasionally when I could half open my eyes I could see that Gulzar was feeling as concerned for my condition as only a member of my immediate family would have felt. The very idea that there was someone who cared lifted my sagging spirits and made me feel – howsoever vaguely - secure.

The first week after our arrival at Kasoor was as uneventful as the journey from Lahore to Kasoor. The over-all atmosphere in the jail was less oppressive than what I had been encountering till now. Even the customary five lashes welcome for the 'Kafir Sikhs' that I was told was uniformly common in all Pakistani prisons was found missing on our arrival at the sub-jail. As I got acquainted with the jail staff and some lumberdars I learnt that it all depended upon the kind of person the jailor was. Mr. Varaich, the superintendent of Kasoor sub-jail was basically a kind-hearted person. The lumberdar, an elderly person serving a life sentence had developed certain unique insights into jail life because of his long experience behind the bars. "The jail is a khalk (world) by itself and the jailor its khalik (lord of the world)," he would say and add, "Khalik khalk nu apni marji naal chalanda hai" (the lord runs his world as he pleases).

Gulzar and myself were kept in two separate cells situated within the same barrack. We were not allowed to interact or even come out of our cells at any time

of day and night. The only time we saw the face of another human being was when the jail staff came to serve us our daily meals in the morning and evening. The standard fare served was two chapattis and daal except on Fridays when meat (beef or mutton) was served but the two of us – perhaps the only non-muslims in the entire subjail – were given the option of going for two additional chapattis and some more quantity of daal in lieu. As compared to the horrors of forced feeding of beef in the quarter guard just after our brief but tranquil stay with the Baluch soldiers these small gestures reportedly inspired by the good natured jailor Mr.Varaich were great solace.

It was not clear to me why I had to be shifted to this sub-jail. My occasional enquiries with the jail staff evoked no response and they used to often get irritated with my persistent queries, accusing me of trying to take away their secure government job by putting such silly questions. "Oye tu kyon saddi naukri de maggar paya hai" (why are you after my job), one day a junior functionary of the jail administration snubbed me when I asked him if he could tell me why I had been shifted from the Lahore central jail to this place. A lone, elderly lumberdar relaxing in the bright sun at a little distance thought it to be a commotion of sorts and got alerted. "Ki gall hai, ai sikh rola kyon panda hai" (what is the matter? Why is this sikh creating a ruckus), he shouted. The staffer kept quiet but I shouted in return and told him what I had wanted to know from him. The lumberdar came near the cell and said without losing his cool that I should know that the poor chap being a 'sarkari banda' (government employee) had got to be a first rate coward. "Ainnu te darke rehna penda hai, ai vichara te sarkar da naukar hai koi tere – mere vangar sarkar da mehmaan te hai nai" (This poor chap is bound to be scared as he is a servant of the government and not a guest of the government like you or I), he elaborated and offered to tell me the reason why I and Gulzar had to be shifted to the Kasoor sub-jail provided I put the question to him in the first place and also agreed to say 'shukriya janab' (thank you sir.) The carefree manner in which he was relaxing and referring to the staffer as a first rate coward, left no doubt in my mind that he was some seasoned criminal for whom the jail had become a second home.

The jail staffer simply vanished, as he perhaps didn't want to be a party even

unwittingly to any state secret being blurted out to an Indian detainee. The lumberdar told me that as per his information there was a charge of illegal border crossing against Gulzar and me and as the border was crossed in the Kasoor sector we were to be tried by the SDM Kasoor because of which we have been shifted here. I suddenly felt bells ringing in my mind. The image of the drunken SHO of Kasoor who on the very first night of my arrest had warned me to make sure that if I didn't confess before him I should make sure that I didn't confess before any other agency. I also remembered his chilling warning that irrespective of where and before which agency in Pakistan I confessed to crossing illegally in Pakistan, I shall not be able to escape him as the case would ultimately come to Kasoor for a trial. I thought matters would be all the more tough for me because of the parting shot fired by me when I had mischievously sown seeds of suspicion by telling the SHO in the presence of the FIU personnel "I shall keep in mind what you (SHO) told me last night." I felt haunted by the SHO and what he might do to me in case I found myself face to face once again with him.

My fears were allayed by the lumberdar who turned out to be an amazingly well informed person. "Kaka tu hai vadda shatir," he said addressing me reverently. "O bhen**** SHO apne aapnu pata nahin ki samajhda si lekin tu ta oddi maa di *** karti. Sunya hai ki teri di hoyi ittala de kaaran os haramjade nu etthun sut ditta gaya." He then tried to stretch his hand inside the cell in an attempt to pat my back adding, boht changa kitta oss haram jade ne ik vari mere utte vi hath chuk leya si." (Young man you seem to be very clever. I have heard that you fixed that SHO who used to think too much of himself. You know once that bastard even thrashed me. I was very happy to learn that the bastard has been thrown out of Kasoor because of the information provided by you to the FIU.) The lumberdar finished with an open offer of help whenever needed by me and informing me that the staff of the sub-jail was scared of me because of which no one would ever dare to ill-treat me as long as I was in Kasoor. The lumberdar had undoubtedly given me enough reason to feel happy and elated.

It was nearly a week after my arrival in the sub-jail when one morning I was told to take bath and get ready as I was to be taken for a 'peshi' (attendance) in the 'adalat' (court). This time there was no van and both Gulzar and I were made to

walk with bar-fetters and handcuffs. It was a humiliating site and as usual I couldn't control tears rolling down my eyes. Gulzar sought to console me and surprisingly the policeman on escort duty – a kind hearted elderly person - too joined in. "Kaka himmat rakh," the policeman said in a soothing voice. "Saddi vi majboori hai, nahin te sannu koi changa lagda hai phullan vargae munde nu beddi ja hathkadi lana. Sabar kar! Allah khair karuga." (Don't lose heart young man. Try to understand our compulsions. We don't feel happy in making an elegant young man like you walkin bar-fetters and handcuffs. Have patience. Allah will take care of you.)

We finally reached and it turned out to be the court of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) who is primarily an executive officer assigned some judicial duties under the Cr.PC (The Criminal procedure Code) inherited commonly by both India and Pakistan from their erstwhile colonial masters at the time of partition of India. Under the code certain officers originally belonging to the executive are conferred Magistracy with limited judicial powers of issuing warrants of arrests, detention orders and in some cases even prison sentences. Generally such powers are available to the executive magistracy in the context of maintenance of law and order and apprehension of breach of peace. In Pakistan it seems the SDMs had been given powers for trying cases of illegal border crossing as well. Generally the popular impression in legal circles is that the executive magistrates are not as scrupulous about observance of law and legal procedures as their counterparts belonging to the judicial service are. Till now I had seen only one example of a judicial officer in Pakistan and that was Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memone of Lahore and was wondering if a more unscrupulous approach to law could at all be possible.

The first few minutes I spent in the court of the SDM however left me greatly relieved. The SDM turned out to be a sophisticated man with little trace of malice or hostility because of my Indian connection, thereby belying the myth about executive magistrates being less judicious than the judicial ones. "Amriksingh and Gulzar Masih," he said in a dignified manner with a liberal mix of Punjabi, Urdu and English language, "there is a charge against both of you that you crossed the border from India into the Kasoor sector of Pakistan. Do you have anything to say in your defence?" "Janab main aikehna chawnda haan ke mera

naun Amriksingh nahin hai" (Sir I want to say that my name is not Amriksingh), I said trying to grab the opportunity given by the SDM. Without losing his calm and dignified deportment the SDM told that there is nothin[illegible]e could do in the matter as the papers being produced before him showed that as per my own confession made before a judicial magistrate in Lahore my name was Amrik Singh. In any case he said I was free to seek whatever relief I wanted to seek on the issue from the competent court. As far as he was concerned, my defence was to be limited to whether or not I had crossed into Pakistan from the Indian side of the border in Kasoor sector. Perhaps trying to make the atmosphere less tense he added with a disarming smile, "Uddan vi kaka naun vich ki paya hai. Naun te bass ik Allah da suchcha hai baki te saare naun phizul ne." (In any case young man what is there in a name. It is only the name of Allah that is true. All other names are meaningless). The SDM asked both of us not to panic or make a statement in haste and fixed another date for the next appearance.

On the next date we were asked if we had any Advocate to plead our case. We had none. He asked the escort team to find some advocate for us but the policemen pleaded helplessness saying, "enna kafiraan lai kaun tyar hovega janab." (Who will agree to defend these infidels sir.) The SDM immediately snubbed the policeman warning him not to use lose or undignified language in the Court and gave another date. After 4-5 dates he gave his verdict. The charge of illegal border crossing stood proved and the accused AmrikSingh and Gulzar Masih were sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment.

16

'Kasoori' – Jail Mian Wali

After the prison sentence handed down by SDM Kasoor I had reconciled to whatever future had in store for me. I knew that my life was already ruined beyond any prospects of salvaging. My friends in the engineering college often used to say, "you live only once and if you leave anything un-enjoyed you will never ever have it again because you never live twice in this world. We used these phrases to bolster our enthusiasm for life and its unique pleasures with youthful gusto. Ironically the memories succeeded in only demoralizing. The elderly lumberdar who had become my fan because he thought I had outwitted the wily SHO of Kasoor, was a perennial source of encouragement saving me from putting into effect the suicidal tendencies that had started filling my mind once again. Occasionally whenever Gulzar got any chance to communicate, he too succeeded in pulling me out of acute depression for howsoever-short duration.

One day the lumberdar asked if I knew that the town of Kasoor was hallowed with the holy shrine of Baba Bullah Shah and the prayers made to the sufi saint never remained unanswered. I sort of jumped out of deep slumber. The memories of my visit to the shrine of the saint, the way I had fainted on listening to the quwwali, "meri bukkalde vich chor" composed by the sufi and the oracular prophesy made by the chief khadim that I was about to face some grave problem came alive and lit up my mind. It was exactly after three days of the prophecy that the FIU men at the kasoor bus stand captured me, I recalled and was soon reminded of the next part that howsoever grave the crisis, I shall come out of it without much harm. I felt a great churning within and became confident that I shall overcome the crisis I was facing. After all, if one part of the prophecy (that I was shortly going to face a grave crisis) had proved so accurate, how could the second part be false or inaccurate, I asked myself and felt confident that after all, this was not going

to be the end of the road for me. In a true spirit of equal reverence for all faiths - the hallmark of the sub-continental psyche – I instantly blended the preaching of the Bhagvat Gita with the spiritual powers of Baba Bullah Shah and chanted aloud, "Na dainyam na cha palayanam." (Neither self-pity nor escapism). Within a few seconds I realized a complete revamping of mood from acute depression to jumping euphoria. No! I said to myself. This cannot be the end of the road for me. I have not committed any crime. I have only done what any other young man of my age would have loved to do in the service of my motherland. If some unscrupulous elements within the MI bluffed or betrayed me, that could be no reason for me to feel guilty. The two-year sentence will be over one day and I shall start my life afresh back home in Jullundur. My mind was full of hopes, fantasy and premonitions.

Perhaps peace of mind was still far off. I had started settling down to the jail routine that was far less oppressive than what I had been experiencing till now. A kind hearted staffer of the jail had even agreed to plead before Mr.Varaich that I be allowed to write a letter to my family in India, a demand that had been persistently turned down till now. I was imagining what and how to write to my parents about the unenviable condition the MI had put me and the vagaries I had been passing through when one day some police personnel came asking me to get ready to move to the Central Jail Mianwali. "Why", I asked as a matter of my right to know. The police personnel didn't reply directly to me but started talking to each other complaining about the misplaced leniency shown by Mr. Varaich to all and sundry "including these kafirs" because of which the entire atmosphere of the jail had been vitiated. "Jailan iddan thode hi chaladi hain, Hun dekho ai bhen**** kafir vi jubaan kholan lag paye ne," said one of them. (Jails can't be run like this. Now look even these kafirs have started raising their voice.) "Ais chudham Varaich da kuchh karna pau. Main SP saab nu vi shikayat kitti hui hai, dekho shayad kuchh pulicia ilaz cheeti ho jau," replied his colleague. (We will have to do something about this cobbler Varaich. I have already spoken to the SP and let us hope some typical police type solution will be found to this problem.)

Instead of giving in, I persisted in asserting my right to know why I was being shifted from the sub-jail. I was a convict serving the sentence awarded to me

by the competent court of SDM Kasoor for illegal border crossing in the Kasoor sector and the place where I had to serve the sentence as per law was no other than Kasoor unless I myself requested for a change of place. "That is the law of Pakistan and you are as much under its obligations as any one else including a convict like me," I asserted forcefully. This seemed to be a little too much for the police personnel who are trained (In India as well as in Pakistan) that the only enforceable law is the word of the policeman and the only valid instrument for enforcing the law is the lathi he carries, all other things including the letter or spirit of the law being irrelevant and not worth the paper used for printing the law books. A hard kick straight in the abdomen quickly followed by a harder slap across my face along with a string of choicest Punjabi abuses came by way of reply from the policemen to me. "Madar**** kafir di aulad, bhen**** sikhde hun tu mainu kanoon sikhauga. Tu sikhauga kanoon mainu haramjade teri bhen di….. teri maa di…..", the policemen were going nonstop in full fury. (You mother fucker son of an infidel you think you can teach me law; you sister fucker dirty sikh bastard.)

Once again my fan, perhaps the only one in the whole of Pakistan, the elderly lumberdar came to my rescue. Catching the policeman's hand with full force to stop him from hitting me he served a chilling warning to the licensed enforcer of law. "Je tu ikvari vihor ais bachche de utte hath chukya na te main tainu jinda nahin chhadna. Pata nahin kinne jurman di saja kat raya vaan ik hor sahi lekin tu nahin bachuga mere hath ton ajj je hoon tu kuchh gadbad kitti." (One more hit from you to this young man and I shall kill you. In any case I am undergoing life sentence for a number of crimes and won't mind one more offence added to my list.) I could see first hand that the lumberdar was no less feared by the policemen than the inmates of the sub-jail. Instead of showing him the power of his position and the uniform he wore, the policeman started pleading with him. "This fellow is a kafir, why do you want to favor him. How does it matter to you even if I kill this Sikh." he asked the lumberdar. "Kaun kafir hai te kaun momin iss da faisla te khuda taal-i ne karna hai kayamat de din. Ai faisla karan wala kaun tu te kaun main. Mainu te bass ai pata hai ki munda bahadur hai te ik bahadur insan naal iddan da saluk nahin hona chahida. Te tainu taklif ki hai ti dasda kyaun nahin vai ainu kyaun uss kasoorwari jail Mianwali le ja rahe ho." (Who is an infidel and

who a believer is for Allah to decide on the day of Judgement. Who are you or I to decide about that? I know only one thing. This fellow is a courageous young man who should not be treated so shabbily. In any case what is your problem, why don't you tell him why he is being taken from here to Mianwali Jail which I know is a 'Kasoori' Jail meant for hardened criminals?)

The policeman relented and disclosed that apart from the illegal border crossing case in which the SDM Kasoor had already sentenced to two years jail term, there was one more case of espionage pending against 'these two' for which it had been decided to shift me to Mianwali. The words 'these two' made it quite clear that Gulzar was once again going to give me company all the way to Mianwali. The policeman sounded quite apologizing pleading with the lumberdar, "Hoon dekhona sadda ae de vich ki kasoor hai. Faisla te gorment da hai, assi ta nikke je mulajim te hukam de tabe daar haan." (What is our fault? We are petty functionaries meant only for implementing the decision that has been taken not by us but by the Government.) As I packed up and was ready to move once again like a beggar turned criminal complete with the bar fetters, handcuffs and a head-load of the little I could consider to be 'my own' belongings, the elderly lumberdar became quite emotional. Hugging me in tight embrace he kissed my forehead much the same way my parents would have, he took out some roasted grams perhaps saved out of the extra rations he earned in lieu of the extra duties done as lumberdar and bade me farewell. "Le ae dane rakhle. Waqt jaroorat kudk levin. Apna khyal rakhin kaka, Hotiyana vadda jalim banda hai ossi kar ke ohnu uss Kasoori jail vich tainat kitta gaya hai." (Keep these roasted grams. You might need them. Take care. Hotiyana is a devil and that is why he has been posted to that Kasoori Jail.) Who is hotiyana? What is the meaning of 'Kasoori' jail? I put a few basic questions but the elderly lumberdar couldn't reply as his throat seemed choked because of the flood of tears rolling down from his eyes to hide which he covered his face with both his hands even as I was dragged by the policemen towards the waiting van.

Our arrival at the Mianwali Jail coincided with a long drawn out discussion whether Gulzar and I were to be treated as undertrials or convicts. The discussion seemed to be turning from officious to academic to pedantic. While the police

team that escorted us from Kasoor insisted that we had to be treated as convicts because of the sentence already handed down by the SDM Kasoor in the illegal border crossing case some staffers of the Jail had their own doubts as according to them we were brought to Mianwali for trial of an offence in which conviction was yet to come. The senior most policeman from the escort team wished to bury the hatchet by saying that it made no difference as even a convict in Kasoor sub-jail was given better treatment than an under-trial in Mianwali 'because of that idiot Varaich.' "Bhavain tussi ainnnun mehman vi bana ke rakho taan vi innan kafiraandi halat kasoor taun badtar rahugi, Allah Hotiana saab nu hayati bakshe." (Even if you treat these infidels as your guests their condition will be worse than what it was as convicts in Kasoor. May God give long life to Mr.Hotiyana.)

As the discussion was going on a relatively senior looking functionary – perhaps a convict turned lumberdar – entered the scene. Giving a mild rebuff to his colleagues he told them not to forget the 'rawayat' (sacred traditions) because of the senseless discussion. "Oye bhale lokiyon saddi jailvich sikh aaye ne pehlan innan da istakbal te kar levo. Bahas baad vich vi ho sakdi hai. Hun pare hatto main baint maar nu naal le ke aayaa haan." (We have two Sikhs reporting in our jail. First make arrangements for their welcome and leave aside your discussion. Now come on I have brought the lasher with me.) The lasher (commonly addressed as 'pehalwanji' meaning Mr. Wrestler) asked us to lie down on our bellies. As we quietly obeyed the command he asked Gulzar to get up and 'see the fun'. In an ugly show of sadism he compelled Gulzar to see me being lashed and feel the pain. I had been through the ordeal of being lashed on a number of occasions earlier but this one was more painful and humiliating than all the previous ones. While jumping after taking a small run up to make the lashes more forceful and painful the 'baint-mar' on instructions from the policeman was shouting abuses to 'the infidels,' 'sikhs' and surprisingly, 'Varaich da bachcha' apparently displaying contempt and resentment against Mr. Varaich, the superintendent of Kasoor sub-jail perhaps for his soft image in the official circles. After the 'istakbal'(welcome) the bar-fetters that were removed for facilitating better lashing was put again and we were lodged in two separate cells for the night. The lumberdar who had taken all the initiative in organizing the 'istakbal' told us to be ready for 'mulehza'

(interview) by Hotiana saab the next morning.

'Mulehza' by 'Hotiana saab' turned out to be quite an elaborately painful ceremony. The Jail Superintendent, Mr.Jahangir Khan Hotiana of Bahawalpur claimed his descent from a a highly aristocratic land owning family and considered it his duty to conduct himself like the feudal lords of the bygone era in every possible way. Cruelty and harshness in dealing with the prison inmates according to him was his legitimate right not only as superintendent of the jail but also as heirloom of the land owning aristocracy of rural Punjab. The jail manual or for that matter any other law simply didn't apply in his jail of which he was not just the superintendent but also its uncrowned king. He treated the jail not as his charge but as his kingdom where he presided over the destiny of every inmate including life and death. He had his own jail manual, which even though unwritten was known not just to the inmates and staff of his own jail but to the wider circle of his colleagues and most of the veteran criminals in other jails across Pakistan. The elderly lumberdar in sub-jail Kasoor knew about him and had advised me to be careful about 'that jalim (devil) Hotiana.'

All the inmates who had been brought to the jail since the last 'mulehza' were lined up. Gulzar and I were also in line. We were brought from the cell with some half a dozen escorts (most of them convicts assigned sundry administrative duties) and two lumberdars. The lumberdars had sufficiently educated us about the protocols and mannerism to be observed during the event. We were told that no prisoner has ever seen or can ever see the face of Hotiana saab. During 'mulehza' he remains behind a window from where he can see the prisoner but the prisoner cannot see him. "Hotiana saab can only be felt and not seen" was the talk of the prison. The prisoners were also required to keep their chin, eyes and head down while answering questions put by saab and the voice was not to be raised beyond what is absolutely essential for being audible to saab who gets equally upset if the voice is too low or too high. What is too low or too high and the punishment in either case was decided only by saab and the lumberdars escorting the inmates for mulehza were under standing orders to promptly execute the order of punishment on the spot as soon as it was pronounced by saab.

I was at number 6 or 7 in the line up of fresh arrivals waiting for their turn for the mulehza. When my turn came I quickly dropped my chin down and made sure my eyes were down cast as instructed by the escorts. I couldn't see the superintendent although I could distinctly hear the deep husky sound coming from behind a window at some distance where perhaps the mysterious Mr. Hotiana was sitting and watching all of us who were lined up. "Apni shakal vikha, munh utte kar" (raise up and show your face), I heard someone giving a command but didn't react as the escorts had given me strict instructions not to raise my head, chin or eyes during the ceremony. "Ik chapeda la aide" (Slap him), came the other command perhaps as instant punishment for disobedience of orders given earlier to raise and show the face. The escorts who started hitting me hard under my chin and across the face promptly executed the sentence with lightning speed. I was confused and nervous whether to follow the advice given by the escorts earlier or the command coming from the invisible source from behind the large window. I felt blood gushing out of my nostrils and mouth and wanted to wipe the same but the escorts won't let me do that. Finally one lumberdar put a wooden rod under my chin and raised my face up. After seeing my face the mysterious voice gave a string of commands. "Ainu cell number 14 vich rakho te bagair nalle di salwar paan lai devo. Naale da istemal bataur phansi karn da khatra hai. Cell taun bahr nahin kadna hai, haan daily savere koi 15-20 minute jangley de kol baith sakda hai. Cell da darwaja chovi ghantyan vich sirf ik vari khulega savere jadon ghade de vich paani paya jayega. Savere roj panj patte mare jaan gai te 10 kilo munji kuttan nu ditti javegi." (He will be kept in cell No: 14 and given a salwar to wear without the string to tie it round his waist. There is risk of the tying string being used by him for hanging or strangulating himself. He is not to be taken out of the cell but he can sit near the grilled gate of the cell for 15-20 minutes every day in the morning. The door of he cell shall be opened only once in 24 hours for filling the earthen pitcher kept in the cell for storing water. Every morning he will be given five lashes with the whip and 10 kg of twigs shall be given which he shall pound for making 'munji' – rope - by the evening.) Mr. Hotiana finished in typical military style by asking, "Koi shak" (Any doubts?) to which the lumberdars and escorts replied in chorus "Nahin janab" (No sir) and withdrew me from the line

bowing at the same time in the direction of the window in the style reminiscent of the Mughal era. One of the escorts suddenly started beating me shouting, "Oye sajda te kar saab nu haramjade, kafir hoya te kihoya sajda vi nahin karuga." (Why don't you bow to saab. So what if you are an infidel. Can't you even bow in respect for the Jailor.)

I could have hundred and one reasons to detest Mr. Jahangir Khan Hotiana of Bahawalpur, the Superintendent of Mianwali Jail but there was one thing for which I still admire him whenever I think of him. The man was remarkably meticulous. In just about 2 or 3 minutes he had spelt out everything about my routine and the kind of treatment I was to get in his jail. The routine ordained by him started almost immediately after the mulehza. By the time I reached back to the cell a jail staffer was already standing with a salwar with the tying string duly missing from it. The earthen pitcher was already filled with water and a huge bundle of twigs was lying in a corner. I was told that it had been already weighed and was 10 kgs. I was to pound it with a well-rounded piece of wood large and heavy enough for twigs to be pounded but not sufficiently large or heavy for any prisoner to kill himself. "It won't hurt you beyond causing some bleeding or a blister if you hit your head but you can't kill yourself howsoever hard you hit your head with it. Some fools keep hurting themselves in such small ways but we aren't bothered as long as there is no death in the jail. If required the doctor also comes to put bandage but soon the fools realize that what they are doing is not in their interest as because of the time lost in these tantrums they can't complete their given labor which results in less food for the night and more work the next morning." The lumberdar who was perhaps put in charge of me tried to educate me.

The routine was depressing but I had no choice except getting down to it. I hated the very site of the lumberdar who had given me the long lecture about the lightweight wooden piece with which I was to pound the twigs into rope. He was a hefty looking elderly man who I guessed must be a Pathan from the frontier area of Pakistan adjoining Afghanistan. Judging by the emotionless manner in which he had narrated the cold logic for not making any attempt to hit myself with the wooden piece meant for pounding the twigs I also thought he must be a perverted sadist with the finer human sensitivities completely blunted. I was only partially

right. The old man was a Pathan no doubt but he turned out to be an extremely kind hearted human being.

His name was Gulkhan Pathan and he was serving a life sentence for the murder of his own son-in-law. Within 2-3 days he opened up before me and explained that he had to put up the façade of being an unscrupulous sadist only to escape the wrath of the jailor Mr. Hotiana who considered kindness to be a vice and a weakness and cruelty an essential ingredient of manliness. "Hotiana is a through and through perverted human being," he said in hushed voice and explained why the government had deliberately posted him to this particular prison. "You must have heard in Kasoor that Mianwali is a 'Kasoori'jail, he asked me. "Yes indeed", I said, "but I do not know what does Kasoori mean"? "It is so simple," Gulkhan explained, "don't you know that 'kasoor' in Punjabi means guilt and 'kasoorwar', guilty?" Kasoori jail means the jail in which all the inmates are essentially guilty. In simple terms it means a jail where majority of inmates are seasoned and hardened criminals and to deal with such inmates a Hotiana is better bait than a Varaich. Quite obviously, my newfound friend was aware that the superintendent of Kasoor sub-jail, Mr. Varaich had a better reputation.

Gulkhan and I became good friends but didn't let the secret out for fear of retaliation by Mr. Hotiana and his cronies. Because of his age and the fact that he was undergoing sentence for murder, Gulkhan was a highly respected inmate of the jail. (How so ever queer it may sound but one has to understand that in a prison the respect shown to an inmate is in direct proportion to the severity of the crime committed by him. While petty crooks like pickpockets or thieves are despised and treated with contempt, those convicted for murder, dacoity or some similarly serious crime are shown abundant respect. Besides in Pakistani jails there was a clear distinction between an ordinary murderer and one convicted in a case of honor killing, which was not seen as a crime at all according to popular perception in the frontier areas. My friend Gulkhan Pathan was serving time in a case of honor killing.)

Gulkhan helped me complete the labor of pounding 10kg twigs every day assigned to me and also occasionally managed to give some special items of

food he was privileged to have by virtue of his position of a lumberdar. He also managed to take upon himself the duty of giving five lashes daily to me and made sure that the sound of the whip was louder than the pain it inflicted upon me. He narrated to me the entire story of the case that got him the life sentence. His son-in-law Umerkhan was a sprightly young man whom he actually loved but he was helpless because of the more fundamental issue of the family honor. There was simmering feud between the two families for quite some years and each side had murdered some male member belonging to the other. It was Umerkhan's family who started the process by killing one member from Gulkhan's side and poor Gulkhan had no option but to retaliate. "They murdered one of us and in return we murdered one of them," Gulkhan would say. "The process should have stopped there itself as the score was already settled at one from each side but Umerkhan's side were unreasonable. They murdered one of us a second time. We again retaliated and thought the matter was over as the score was once again settled at two from each side but those fellows were mad, as they always wanted to be one up. We were sick of it and wanted to equalize at the earliest. Those fellows were not in our easy reach and we couldn't imagine the story being ended with them having one head more than us as leaving the score in their favor would have left an everlasting blot on our family's honor. The family therefore decided that I marry my daughter to Umerkhan so that he becomes available to us and the score is settled quickly. I agreed to the suggestion and did what I had to do to save the family's honor."

According to Gulkhan, horror killings and honor killings were common in the frontier area of Pakistan and every day 2-3 convicts were hanged across the country in such cases. In some families if no adult male member was left to take revenge, young boys were encouraged to settle the score when they come of age. To initiate the youngsters into the world of crime and battle inoculate them against the hardships of jail life sometimes they are told to commit some petty crimes so that they had a firsthand experience of life in jailand also learnt how to commit crimes like murder from the experts. I found Gulkhan to be an enigmatic character. He had so much love and compassion for a stranger like me but the same person had also killed his own son-in-law. "Didn't you love your son-in-law"?

I had once asked Gulkhan to which his reply was he still loved that handsome young man and cried whenever he remembered him or some one talked about him. "Pathans don't cry openly Amrik Singh but my heart cries for that handsome young man all the time," he told me. When I asked him why did he commit the murder in that case, Gulkhan would simply say that his duty to safeguard the honor of the family was more important than his personal emotions. The strangle hold of social compulsions over inarticulate minds perhaps couldn't get more invidious.

17

The Court Martial and Shuttling from Mianwali to Kot Lakhpat and Back

Apart from Gulkhan Pathan I found another friend in the Mianwali Jail. He was Jarnail Singh, an inmate – perhaps a convict – who was given the task of preparing meals for 'Sikh' (Indian) prisoners. I never got to know any details about Jarnail Singh or the crime on account of which he was serving time except that he too had crossed over the border from India and was captured. He had fully come to terms with the jail life and in the process become completely dispassionate or you may even say, emotionless. His routine was quite simple. Every morning he would be given ration from the jail store as per 'Sikh scales' – slightly less than the entitlement of the native Pakistani prisoners – with which he would churn out what might be called delicacies from the jail standards and serve to his Indian compatriots lodged there. He would skirt and avoid all questions about who he was and why was he in jail with stoic silence. The only occasion he spoke to me was when I asked him if there were any more Indians except Gulzar and myself in the jail to which he briefly replied, "Ik full barrack bhari pai hai Sikhan naal." (One whole barrack is full of 'Sikhs'.) As he whispered these words he was cautiously, nay, frightfully looking around to make sure that there was no one around to snoop or sneak.

When I started feeling at home in this hellhole of a jail I had a lurking fear that later than sooner I would be shifted to another place as had been the pattern till now right since the brief stint of peace and tranquility I experienced while in the custody of the Baluch soldiers. A psychiatrist may explain the phenomenon as nothing more than heightened feeling of insecurity but in my view it was an intuitive premonition that could be explained only as a supernatural mystery. I was right. One morning the usual bundle of twigs was not delivered in the cell as part of my

daily labor and the 'nashta' of two chapattis and half mug of tea came earlier than the fixed time. Soon thereafter Gulkhan Pathan came to announce that I had to be shifted to Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore in connection with some case pending against Gulzar and me under the court martial regulations. While I did feel sorry for being parted from Gulkhan Pathan and Jarnail Singh, I wasn't nervous as I thought any jail in Pakistan should be better than Mianwali under Mr. Hotiyana.

On reporting in the jail we were greeted with the usual five lashes by the 'baint-mar' and assigned to separate cells in the same barrack. The next week was quite boring as we could neither meet the other inmates in the barrack nor had any news of the pending trial by the court martial. After nearly 10 days a visitor was announced. He turned out to be a young Bengali subaltern (a second lieutenant) of the Pakistani Army. A soft-spoken, delicate looking young man, he announced to me that with the approval of the competent authority it had been decided to subject me to trial by a FGCM (General Field Court Martial) under some clauses of the FGCM of 59. The trial, I was told was to go into the charge of violation of the official secrets act (OSA) of Pakistan brought against me. Finally, the young army officer declared that he had been assigned the duty of acting as my defence assistant during the trial because of which he had come to discuss the case and the defence strategy with me. I was quite impressed with what appeared to be the most systematic approach displayed by the army for its court martial. Till now I had been charged and tried only by the civilcourts. In some cases I had even been convicted and sentenced but no court or prosecutor at any stage ever told me about the provision of law under which I was being charged or the code under which the procedure of the trial was regulated. Magistrate Faisal Tehseen Memone stood-out as a classic example of what a Magistrate should not be but the Army appeared to be quite transparent and fair.

The subaltern asked the jail staff to move away as he needed some privacy for discussing the case with his client for effective defence. I shared my admiration for the army with the young subaltern. "Don't be a kaddu (pumpkin)," he retorted in typical military slang. "This is all drama. Decision has already been taken that you are guilty and have to be given a stern sentence so that it serves as an example to other kafirs like you. The entire sequence of the FGCM proceedings has been

already decided. Even I have been given written instructions on the questions I should put to the prosecutor on your behalf and the answers to be given by the prosecutor. As far as I know the sentence to be awarded to you shall be no less than 10 years," the young Bengali was quite frank. "If that is so then why this drama," I asked, "why couldn't they simply inform me at Mianwali that I have to serve another sentence of ten years under the FGCM." My question seemed to have touched a raw nerve of the subaltern. "All armies have their own share of farce but in the Pakistani army everything is through and through a farce," the erudition typical of a Bengali was clearly visible in what he said. Opening up slowly and painfully he informed me that he was not interested in taking up the assignment of acting as my defence assistant, not because he was indifferent to the plight of an unfortunate stranger stranded in an alien land but because he knew that he would be unable to do justice to the job on account of the handicaps inherent in the system.

The young subaltern soon moved on to more substantial issues of ethnic sub-nationalism and social justice. He could not hide the deep resentment he had against what he called the 'Punjabi-Baluch' domination of the army in Pakistan. He had no doubt that Bengalis are looked down upon and seen as badly lacking in the martial qualities required for a successful career in the army which the Punjabis and Baluch officers thought themselves as having in abundance. A Punjabi or a Baluch can never tolerate if a Bengali officer rises to senior position in the Army, nor do the Punjabi or Baluch soldiers show due respect to an officer if he happens to be a Bengali, he thought. "Our cultural traditions are completely different from these chaps," he remarked and added with a deep sigh, "one day we shallalso be a free country and have an army that will be our own, Insha Allah." As he left warning me once again not to expect too much from the impending trial by the FGCM, I was wondering about the peculiar twist in the story of Pakistan. My Baluch friends in whose protection I remained for a week full of peace and dignity were as resentful of what they perceived to be the 'Punjabi domination' of the Pakistani army as my Bengali friend was about what he saw as the "Punjabi-Baluch' domination. Perhaps he didn't know that the Baluch hated the Punjabis no less than he did. In fact so oblivious was my Bengali friend about the Punjabi-Baluch divide that he

thought the two meant almost one and the same ethnic group. Had he and other Bengali officers like him known these subtle nuances, the history of Pakistan or Bangladesh would have been somewhat different.

After approximately one week I was told to get ready to leave for an undisclosed location where the FGCM was reportedly meeting. The bar-fetters were removed but my hands were tied behind, blindfold was put on and I was shoved into what felt like an army truck. It turned out to be a nonstop journey lasting for over an hour. After being thrown down the truck I was escorted into what appeared to be some temporary structure (called the ty. hutted accommodation in the army) common in the army's field areas in both India and Pakistan. I heard an officer give command to remove the blindfold. The command was executed with usual military swiftness and I saw that the court martial had already assembled. It comprised of a Brigadier, one Colonel and two Majors of the Pakistani army. Another Major was acting as the prosecutor with two Captains assisting him. Last but not least was the young Bengali Second Lieutenant to act as my defence assistant.

The proceedings of the court Martial started with the Prosecutor reading out the charges framed against me. The moment he read out my name as Amrik Singh I interjected to say that I was not Amrik Singh. It was ignored in toto as no one in the Courtroom even acknowledged my submission. The Defence Assistant wanted to draw the court's attention to my objection but was curtly snubbed by the prosecutor and told, "bakwas na kar" (don't talk nonsense.) The Brigadier who was apparently acting as the presiding officer of the court asked me if I had anything to say about the charges. "My preliminary objection has already been ignored by the court and even my defence assistant has been silenced most rudely; what can I say under the circumstances", I said in one go and with full show of confidence. The Brigadier again pretended not to have listened to anything at all and started reading from the wad of papers lying in front of him. I was in no mood to give in so easily and raised another technical objection. "The members of the court are in military uniform but none of them are having his name lapel. How do I know who the honorable members of the court are," I said trying to sound serious and businesslike. This was too much for the Brigadier who after giving a long, dirty, killing look gesticulated angrily saying, "oye chup kar oye kafir di aulad. Apna

naun te pata hai nahin te sadde naun di fikar karn lagya hai." (Shut up you son of an infidel. You don't know your own name and are worried about our names.) He then turned to the prosecutor asking him to do something to discipline the accused. The prosecutor in turn started shouting at my young Bengali friend for his failure to keep me in check. Soon everyone in the room except the Bengali officer started conversing in Punjabi occasionally ridiculing and lampooning the Bengali for no apparent rhyme or reason. I instantly understood the pain and anguish of the Bengali subaltern for what he called the 'Punjabi-Baluch' domination of the Pakistani army.

It took some three or four hearings for the farce to be over. The entire affair was bitter, unpleasant and humiliating. There were times when in utter disregard of his status as a commissioned officer, the defence assistant was treated worse than a peon only because he insisted for observance of the most rudimentary requirements of a fair trial. Every such occasion invariably coincided with scorn and ridicule expressed openly for the Bengali community of Pakistan in general and my young Bengali defence assistant in particular. During each hearing whenever the defence assistant wanted to put a question or a counter question on the reply given by a deponent or sought elaboration on any of the point raised by the prosecutor he was rudely snubbed and told to keep his mouth shut. On one occasion the Brigadier presiding over the court threatened him with disciplinary action if he persisted with his 'irrelevant queries'. "Oye kitthe teri apni khwahish ta nahin ess sikh di thaan khalovan di. Assi o vi kar sakde haan lekin sadde kol itthe barbad karan nu time kitthe hai. Assi apni unit te jake hor vi kam karna hai. Sadde kol ehoje befizul kamman taun changai kam karn nu hagai. Tu marha ja chup karna vi sikh le hun." (Do you want to stand as accused in place of this Sikh? We can arrange that also but we have no time to waste for such useless work as this GCM. We have to go back to our unit and do our work which in any case is better than this work we are doing here.)

During the 3 – 4 hearings when the FGCM lasted, I was kept in a quarter guard under military custody. Every morning I used to be brought before the court after breakfast and taken back late in the evening. The food served by the army was any time better than the jail food I got in Kot Lakhpat or Mianwali but on par with

what was served in the Kasoor sub-jail. But the complete seclusion because of the remote location of the venue of the Court and absence of any other inmate in the quarter guard made me feel depressed and demoralized.

The solitude was broken one evening by an unexpected visitor, the 'Unit Maulvi' (The Muslim priest attached to the army unit). After exchange of usual Islamic greeting of 'salam walequm' and 'walequm assalam,' the Maulvi started an unsolicited, impromptu sermon about the preaching of Islam. As I was no less familiar with the Holy Koran and the core teachings of Islam than any native Muslim, I could comfortably join the discussion and carry on the conversation with ease. The Maulvi sympathized eloquently with my plight and quoted some verses from the Holy Koran to convince me that whatever happens is as per the will of Allah who because He is most compassionate and merciful can get a human being out of the worst kind of misery unscathed, provided the sufferer prays to Him from the depths of his heart in total earnestness. As I had read the Holy Koran I started joining the Maulvi in the recitation and found every reason to agree with whatever was said by him. "Masha Allah! You have such deep knowledge of the Holy Koran and the preaching of the Holy Prophet why don't you embrace the true faith of Allah and convert to Islam"? He said it so suddenly that I needed some time for it to sink fully in my mind and respond. Mistaking the pause for favorable consideration of the offer the Maulvi clasped my hand and added, "Kaka Islam kabool kar ke etthe apna ghar basa. Teri saja muaf karvadyangai te nikka ja jameen da tukra gorment kolun allot karva ke kisse sohniji kudi naal tera nikah padhvadyangai. Etthe rah te qaum di khidmat kar. Pakistan di khidmaat Islam di khidmat hai. Ki karenga utthe kafiraan kaul jaa ke." (Young man! embrace Islam and settle down here in Pakistan. We shall get all the cases against you dropped. A small piece of land can be allotted to you and your 'nikah' (marriage) arranged with some nice girl. Settle down here and serve the country. The service of Pakistan is service of Islam.)

For a moment I thought there was nothing wrong with the offer. After all it could rid me of all the trials and tribulations hoisted upon me largely because of the tall but false promises made by the MI in Jullundur. The popular saying of 'you live life only once' flashed in my mind and I could think of no good reason to say no to

the Maulvi. It was but only a flash that vanished as promptly as it had come. The next moment I thought of the real intention of the Maulvi behind the offer and felt small within for having succumbed – howsoever temporarily - to the offer which was in clear violation of the tenets of Islam itself. I recalled what our Muslim family friends used to say – and there were plenty of them before the partition of India - about conversions. "To you your religion, to me mine," is what the Holy prophet had said. The Holy Koran lays down stringent conditions for ascertaining consent of a non-muslim before converting him to Islam and equally stringent responsibility upon the one who carries out the conversion to make sure that the consent was voluntary. I quoted the verses from the scripture and asked the Maulvi to look within and decide for himself whether the manner and the circumstances in which he was asking me to convert were strictly as per 'farman-e-ilahi' (the ordainment of the Almighty)? The Maulvi was neither expecting nor used to such response and left hurriedly hurling out curses that a great fire awaited me in hell because of my reluctance to convert. "Main tainu salah de sakna vaan salahiyat nahin" (I can give you good advice but not the capacity to discern good advice from bad), was his parting shot in utter disgust. The very next day I was told that the Court had concluded hearing and reserved the matter for Judgment. As my custody in the army's quarter guard was no longer necessary, I was shifted back to Kot Lakhpat Jail the next day. After a month or two I was told that the FGCM has delivered the verdict against me and a Captain of the Army had come to read it out tome in person. I was therefore taken to the Jail Superintendent's office to hear the sentence. The Jail Superintendent's office had been temporarily converted into a courtroom of sorts.

As soon as I reported there the Captain started reading out the sentence with due formalities expected on such occasions. "Mulzim Amrik Singh!" he addressed me rather ceremoniously," Pakistan ke official secrets act ki khilafvarzi ke ilzam mein FGCM ne tumhe 10 saal kaid e ba mashakkat ka hukam sunaya hai. Tumhariye saza gair kanooni tarike se sarhad paar karne ke ilzam mein tumhe pahle se hi di gayi do saal ki kaide ba mashakkat kisaza kesath sath chalegi." (Accused Amrik Singh! The FGCM has sentenced you to 10 years rigorous imprisonment for violation of the official secrets act of Pakistan. The sentence shall run concurrently

with the two years' sentence already given to you in another case of illegal border crossing.) The moment the Captain completed his announcement, the jail staff standing guard started pushing my head down from the side of my back whispering at the same time that I should bow my head before the emissary of the FGCM. I ignored the unsolicited, frivolous advice and once again tried to raise the question about my real name. The Captain pretended as if nothing was said by me or heard by him. He asked the jail staff to obtain my signatures on some papers.

The 10 years sentence had an immediate stunning effect on my body and mind. I fainted on the spot and was revived by the staff and some lumberdars around who started sprinkling water on my face much the same way I and my friends had done to the dove chick mauled by the cat back home in Jullundur some ten years ago. As I was regaining my senses, I felt some one shoving a pen in between my fingers and taking my signatures on the papers. Soon thereafter I was marched back to the cell. In the evening Gulzar came near the cell with the help of a lumberdar who had informed him about my sentencing by the FGCM, to comfort me. From him I came to know that he along with some other MI operatives, namely Inderjeet, Sansari Lal and Lahora Singh alias Pishora Singh was sentenced to 7 years' RI, Madan Gopal was sentenced to 10 years while Bhimsen and Munishwer Chander to 14 years' RI by the same FGCM. I was thinking that so many of us from the MI being together will neutralize the depressing effect of the rigors of jail life but that was not to be. The very next day Gulzar and I were shifted back to Mianwali.

Throughout the journey from Kotlakhpat to Mianwali Gulzar and I were feeling nervous because of the stifling atmosphere of that place largely attributable to the unscrupulous Jail Superintendent, Mr. Jahangir Khan Hotiana. But on reaching we found that refreshing winds of change had swept Mianwali after we left for the FGCM trial. The traditional 'istakbal' with five lashes didn't happen and the Jail staff as well as the lumberdars seemed to have suddenly become exceptionally well mannered. As I was being led to the cell assigned to me Gulkhan Pathan came running to give me the good news that Mr.Hotiana had been transferred and in his place Mr. Nazir Ahmad had joined as the new superintendent. "Oye Nazir Ahmad saab bada allah vala banda hai puttur. O haivan idur se chala gaye abhi idur insaniyat aya hai" (Mr. Nazir Ahmad is a God fearing man. That beast

has gone from here now and humanity restored in this jail.), Gulkhan said in his typical frontier accent looking quite excited.

I was lodged in Barrack No: 2 nicknamed 'Sikh Barrack' as majority of the inmates in the barrack were Indians. Apart from Gulzar and I there were some 20-25 Indian inmates in the cellular barrack. At least two of them had gone insane perhaps due to intense torture, prolonged deprivation and demoralization caused by the jail routine. One of them used to talk to himself most of the time under hallucinations. He would often callout the other inmates and start shouting that he is a senior officer of the CRPF who could have anyone put behind bars for the rest of the fellow's life. Quite obviously he was not mentally deranged by birth and had come to such a pass only as a result of torture by the Pakistani agencies. After about a fortnight Bhimsen, Madan Gopal, Sansari Lall, and Lahora Singh – all MI operatives – came over from Kotlakhpat and joined us in Mianwali in the same barrack. It was quite a reunion and we were happy to be together. Each one of us in the barrack was assigned the task of pounding 10kgs of sarkanda twigs into 'munji' as our daily labor. The other rigors of jaillife were also there but because of the large size of the group we had now stopped brooding and had come to terms with life as it came.

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Some Insights into Real Politik Gained in The Jails of Pakistan

While in Kotlakhpat I had easy access to some of the leading national newspapers of Pakistan because of the friendship I managed with some senior lumberdars and other functionaries of the jail administration. My favorite paper was the 'Nava-e-Waqt,' an Urdu daily of longstanding wide circulation at the grass root level since the pre-partition days. As one of the few surviving relics of fraternal co-existence of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in the undivided Punjab, Nava-e-Waqt still maintained the tradition of printing the date on its daily editions as per the traditional Hindu calendar (Vikrami samvat) in addition to the Islamic (Hizri) and the Julian Christian era. The paper also contained well-nuanced analysis of all the political news in its columns. So lucid was the paper's presentation that some of the inmates who had been regularly reading it in the Jail for a long time had developed an uncanny ability to read between the lines and anticipate the shape of things to come on the political horizon of their country. Normally the two wardens assigned for maintenance of proper order in our barrack would join our group in discussion of the political situation during day time when we were busy pounding the sarkanda for 'munj.' The collective sound produced by the wooden pounder made refreshingly rhythmic with much labored effort by the group was loud enough to not let any outsider listen to what was being discussed by the 'Sikhs.' Soon it became quite a merriment and we started calling the sessions 'Munjikut Zirga.' (The term Zirga became popular in our group much earlier than the Americans sponsored the grand assembly of the Afghans after the Talibans were ousted from power. The choice of the term was our unique way of showing respect to our Pathan lumberdar who not only allowed us the freedom but also took active part in the discussion himself.)

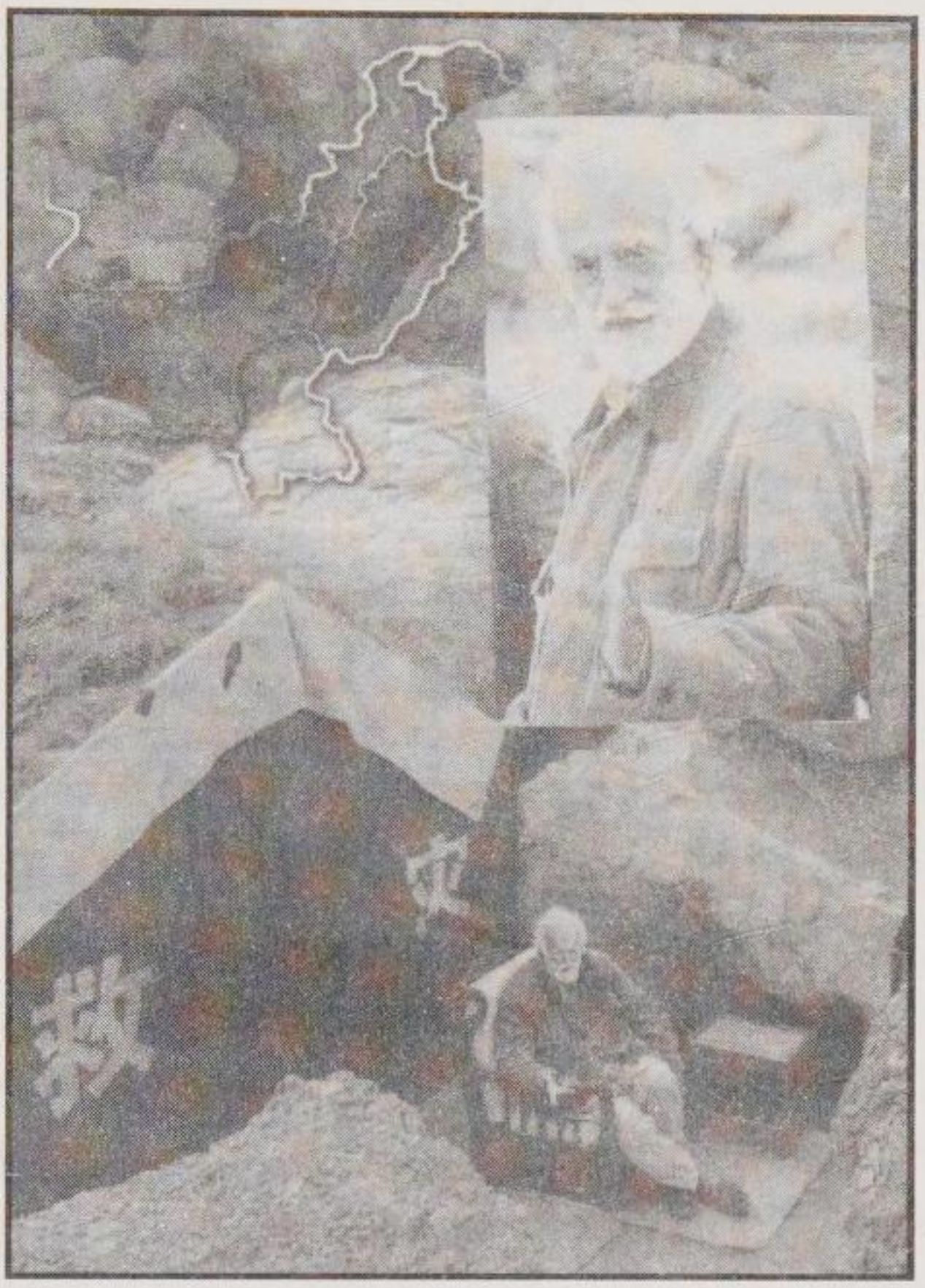
It was in the course of these 'munjikut zirgas' that we learnt that after the Tashkent agreement with India, ZA Bhutto had started an intense campaign of hatred against General Ayub Khan. While General Ayub was busy rounding up the small time agitators and an occasional big fish, their leader Mr. Bhutto was negotiating with the Chinese to consolidate his position. An obliging People's Republic of China not only flushed Bhutto's PPP with funds but also clandestinely deputed some Muslims of Chinese origin for a hands down training to its office bearers on how to manage a political party the Chinese way. China's objective in investing in cash and kind in Pakistan could have been to neutralize an overarching American and nascent Russian influence in the country. It is another matter that with the march of times an unexpected development that took place was the convergence of Chinese and American objectives in the sub-continent when they both started pandering Pakistan for minimizing Indian and Russian influence in equal measure. The arms and ammunitions supplied by both these countries for the sake of Afghan Mujahideens fighting the Russians were diverted to the militants operating in the Kashmir valley with full knowledge of the suppliers – China and the US - as well as the distributor, Pakistan.

Both Bhutto and China succeeded in their game plan, as General Ayub had to step down in favor of General Yahya Khan who appointed Bhutto as his Foreign Minister. The bonhomie with China continued during Bhutto's stewardship of his country's foreign office under the Yahya regime when China started making significant contribution to Pakistan in the field of defence production and supplied, among other things, the T-54 tanks for use by the Pakistan Army. (Ironically it was this damned T-54 Tank that was at the root of my joining the MI and all the good or bad incidents that happened subsequently.) The Sino-Pak military to military cooperation that started in those early days has never had to look back and the rumor mill had it that even the security and intelligence agencies of Pakistan had been penetrated by the Chinese in the later half of the sixties. (How accurate was the assessment of the 'munjikut zirga' became clear to me after I read an interview given by Mr. SUN YUXI to IANS on 27 October 2005 in which he admitted that China had supplied Arms to Pakistan during 1967 – 68 and had also established contact with Pakistan's intelligence agencies. His Excellency further admitted that

arms were supplied to Pakistan for use by the Afghan Mujahideen against the Russian forces. What he left unstated was that some of those weapons landed in the hands of the militants operating in the Kashmir valley which the Peoples' Republic of China didn't mind so long as it served the collateral purpose of neutralizing the Indian influence in the sub-continent.)

The number of political arrests seemed to have risen up towards the fag end of Ayub's regime as one entire newly constructed wing of the jail designated as 'A' class barrack suddenly came alive with a large number of inmates resulting in a flurry of activity. One day the lumberdar asked me if I knew some masonry work, painting and color washing to be precise. The lumberdar also informed me that the cell was being prepared for "Awam da ik boht vadda rehnuma" (A very big leader of the masses.) After I agreed he took me to a relatively well ventilated, commodious cell and I did what the lumberdar called a 'good job rather quickly'. "Tainu ki inam chaida hai dass Amrik" (what is the reward you should get for this good job?), he asked me and I said I want to meet the "boht vadda rehnuma" who was to be lodged in the cell. "Tu vada shedai hai" (you are very naughty), he said affectionately and added, "hun tainu juban ditti hai te mulakat vi karavangai" (Now that I have given you my word I shall have to honor it.)

In the evening just before we were to be locked up in our cells for the night, the lumberdar came running and asked me to follow him to the class 'A' cell. A strikingly handsome person, with well-chiseled features and unusually bright complexion was sitting on a cane chair contemplatively looking out with his gaze fixed and motionless. He looked exactly like one of those heavenly apparitions who visit mother earth only occasionally as divine blessing. I felt dumbstruck because of the overpowering influence of his presence and looking with spontaneous reverence at him said, "Salamwalequm janab". The gentleman returned my greeting with visible affection and looked at the lumberdar perhaps wanting to know who I was and what was the purpose of my visit to the cell. "Ai bechara India da Sikhhai janab te etthe jasoosi vich phadya gaya hai" (This poor chap is a Sikh who has been caught on charges of spying.) "Jasoosi," the man wondered, "koi apne mulk vich vi jasoosi karada hai?" (Spying? How can one be a spy in his own land?) The lumberdar attempted to clarify that I was an Indian and Pakistan was not my land. Looking



exasperated, the man said, "Aap nahin samjhogai" (You won't understand.) He then turned to me and said softly, "Aap kahaan phans gayai? Allah Hafiz!" (Where have you got stuck in this mess? Good-bye!) As I was coming out of the cell, the lumberdar told me that the person I had met was Sardar Akbar Bugti, the uncrowned king of the Bugti tribe of Baluchistan. (In October 2006 when news of Akbar Bugti's death under tragic circumstances came, I couldn't sleep for days together. His handsome figure and tender disposition kept coming repeatedly to my mind and I cried bitterly every night. I would hide my face to make sure that my family members didn't seeme crying as they couldn't have any idea of the intimacy we developed during that brief meeting in Kotlakhpat when he wondered how one could be a spy in his own land thereby giving me the deemed status of his own compatriot. While the lumberdar escorting me might not have understood the true meaning of Sardar Bugti's words, I had clearly grasped the deep meaning they conveyed.)

After Gulzar and I reported back to Mianwali from Kotlakhpat after conclusion of our trial by the FGCM, the stifling, inhuman atmosphere of the jail was completely changed because of the transfer of Jahangir Khan Hotiana. The new Jailor, Chowdhary Nazir Ahmad was an epitome of compassion and humanity. Barrack No: 2, a cellular barrack nicknamed 'Sikh Barrack' had some 25-30 Indian prisoners including our colleagues from the MI. The lumberdar Umar khan and the Head

Warder Baba Sher were both kind hearted Pathans who made every possible effort within the constraints of jail discipline to make light of our rigors. The task of pounding sarkanda for 'munj' was perhaps common in all jails across Pakistan and Mianwali was no exception but the lumberdar and the Head Warder were lenient with those who couldn't complete the given task because of genuine reasons such as ill health. Problems arose because some of our colleagues were used to smoking and wasted considerable time in arranging cigarettes for themselves because of which they couldn't meet the target given by the jail authorities for pounding munji. Even otherwise cigarettes were expensive in the jail and finding money even for buying a single piece was a difficult proposition.

Necessity indeed is the mother of invention. Our smoker friends found an ingenius (albeit somewhat demeaning) method of meeting their requirement of cigarettes. They would collect butts of used cigarettes from allover the jail compound and put them in a glass full of water. After the water turned thick and deep yellow because of the nicotine having dissolved in it, they would soak a sheet of plain paper in the glass overnight after which they would roll the paper like a cigarette and smoke it. The improvised cigarette was called a 'beera' and our friends vouched for its quality being on par with some of the most expensive brands available in the market. My contribution to the enterprise was limited to providing them with sheets of plain paper out of what the Jail administration issued to me for keeping an account of the daily production of munji done by the group. (I also used some of the sheets for jotting down whatever I thought could be of some interest just in case I were to write about my experiences in the jail at a later time. These sheets were confiscated at the time of our release.)

One day the Head Warder Baba Sher told me that the jail administration was badly on need of a 'murammat panja' (group of prisoners who could carry out maintenance and repair of the building) and asked if I would be interested in switching to the new assignment in lieu of 'munji pounding.' "Chowdry saab (Chowdhary Nazir Ahmad, the Jailor) wants that you should be in charge of the 'murammat panja' because he has heard about the good job you did in Kotlakhpat for doing up the cell for Nawab Bugti," Baba Sher confided in me. I agreed to the proposal on the condition that I was given a free hand to select my team and the

'punja' (group) was given some freedom of movement in the jail premises. Baba Sher quickly consulted the seniors and gave his nod. I selected Gulzar Masih, Sansari Lall, Gular Singh, Bhullar, Upinder Mattoo, Ashok Kumar and Rajinder Gupta as my teammates and formed what became famous as the 'Sikh Murammat Punja' in Mianwali.

The 'murammat punja' restored our dignity to some extent as the work was not as humiliating as the pounding of 'munji'. Besides it gave us considerable freedom of movement anywhere in the jail premises between sunrise and sunset. As we visited each and every cell in the course of our new task we also made good friends amongst the local Pakistani prisoners. One such newfound friend was Bashir Ahmad of Sargodha. He came to me one day when our 'punja' was whitewashing the cell in which he was lodged. "Kaka tu Sikh hai" (Are you a Sikh), He asked me. By now I knew that every Indian in the jail was called a Sikh and instead of explaining that I was an Indian Hindu and somewhat different from a Sikh, I simply nodded my head in agreement. Bashir Ahmad quickly dipped his hands in an old tattered 'thaila' (cloth bag) and took out a small booklet. He touched the small book on his forehead in a gesture of reverence and passed it on to me. "Ai mere walid marhoom di amanat hai. Ainu kabool karle" (I have been holding this book in trust on behalf of my late father. Please accept it.). I took the book and touched it to my forehead as a return gesture of respect and opened to see it. The book turned out to be a 'Gutka' (miniaturized version) of 'Granth Sahab' the most revered scripture of the Sikhs. Seeing me looking askance, Bashir Ahmad told that his late father was a Sikh by birth but he converted to Islam at the time of partition. All through his life he read the Holy Koran as well as the Granth Sahab with equal devotion and when the end came he asked me to keep the scripture with full 'reht-maryada' (traditional respect) and give it to some follower of Sikh religion if ever I could come across some in my lifetime. "Allah da ajj vadda karam hoya hai" Bashir Ahmad said with tears rolling down his eyes, "Apne valid marhum di amanat main guru de ik pyare de havele kar rahya haan" (Allah has blessed me today as I am able to deliver this scripture to a follower of the Gurus). I have preserved the scripture with full care and respect and recite from it every day.

Madan Gopal and myself were the two 'Sikh' prisoners who used to meticulously take bath every morning, the cold winters of west Punjab and the non-availability of hot water in the jail not withstanding, after which we used to devote some time to our daily prayers. After Bashir Ahmad handed over his late father's 'Gutka,' I started reciting some verses from it daily after bath in the morning. The departed soul of Bashir's father seemed to have been very pleased, as very soon the morning-prayer sessions became a popular event in which all the other Indian inmates started taking part regularly. As I used to recite the verses aloud the Pakistani prisoners and the Jail staff gave me the nickname 'Sikkhan da Imam" (The prayer leader of the Sikhs.). Bashir Ahmad himself was a devout Muslim and I often saw him join the other fellow prisoners in 'Namaze Fazr' (morning prayer) in his barrack and getting emotional on seeing our group collectively recite the japujisahab from the 'Gutka' belonging to his late father gifted to me.

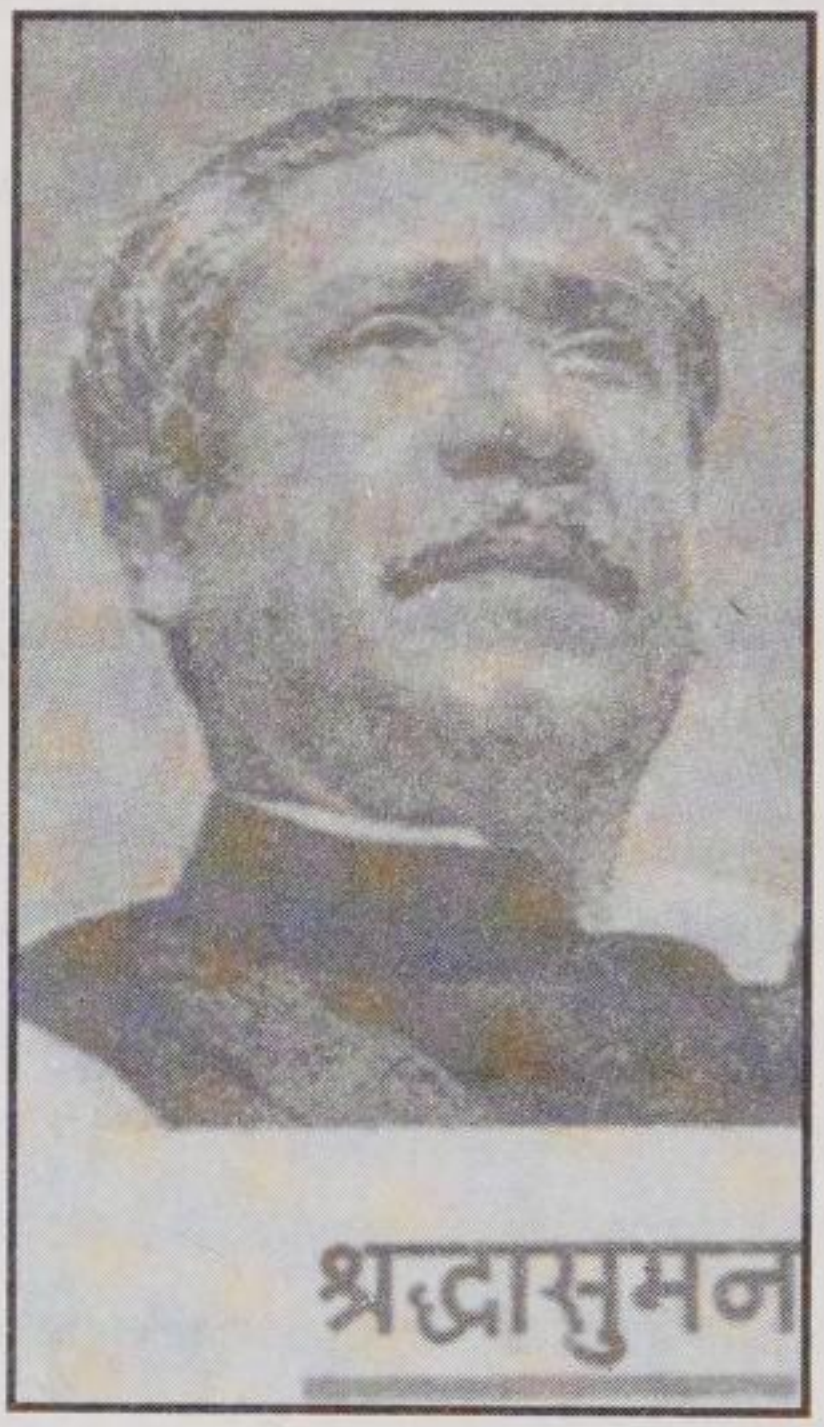
In the initial days just after I was captured by the FIU on 18th September, 1966 I used to keep a mental account of the dates coinciding with my shifting from one quarter guard to the other or from a quarter guard to some police custody. The 'hot-plate' treatment at the Shahiquila made me completely disoriented and I could no longer keep track of time except through some rough guesswork based on the season of the year. Things became normal once again in Kotlakhpat when I had access to 'Nawa-e-Waqt' and could see not only the Christian dates but also the lunar dates as per Hindu calendar. Those of us who wanted could thus observe fasts on 'ekadashi' or 'puranmasi' and even observe in our own small way the Hindu festivals and Guru Purabs. Our time sense once again got disoriented when in Mianwali in spite of all the generosity shown by him the new Jailor Chowdhry Nazir Ahmad didn't allow us access to newspapers. Our estimate of time therefore once again became rough and unreliable. The gossip shared by the Pakistani inmates with us became our only source of information about political situation in Pakistan.

It was perhaps the beginning of 1970 when news started coming about the general elections to be held in Pakistan and the possible scenario post elections. The newspapers were portraying the power struggle between the Bengalis of

Eastern Pakistan and the West Pakistan as an individual power struggle between ZA Bhutto and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Reports of large scale disturbances in East Pakistan and ingenious methods being devised by the political establishment in the West of the country to deny to the Bengalis what should have been their natural station in the overall power structure of Pakistan because of their sheer numbers were coming a plenty. It was obvious that the East and West Pakistan were polarized in their public postures like the Soviet and the American camps during the cold war. General Yahya Khan appeared to be no match to the populist Mr.Bhutto who though a Minister under the General seemed to be actually calling the shots.

It was in this hazy background thick with gossip and rumors that one day lumberdar Umar Khan came to me in the wee hours of the morning, much earlier than the normal unlocking time for the barracks as per jail rules. He asked me to quickly gather the 'murammat punja' and get cracking as a cell had to be done up for a VVIP prisoner by late evening. He took me to a room located just near the women's cell. The whole area was swarming with heavily armed men from a bevy of Pakistan's security forces. We started working straight away and completed the job a little ahead of the given schedule. As we were leaving, the jailor Chowdhry Nazir Ahmad accompanied by his 'lawazma' (subordinates) came for inspection. He pointed out some patches to be given a fresh coat of paint and left for the main office. We were still doing the patchwork when there was a commotion. We were told to keep our stores and implements in a corner and leave immediately as the VVIP inmate had already arrived at the main office and could be brought to the cell any moment. It was obvious the new inmate was some political heavy weight. The mystery was solved the next morning when I accompanied by Umar khan lumberdar and an armed guard went again to the cell to pickup the leftover paint and other stores we had dumped in a corner the previous evening because of the tearing hurry. A tall, well-built bespectacled lonely figure clad in crisp white kurta and lungi was sitting on a chair. The cell was full of the aroma of the tobacco emanating from the smoke puffed out by him from a pipe held delicately between his lips. I was face to face with Sheikh

Mujibur Rehman, the father of yet to be boen nation, Bangladesh. As I paused to greet Sheikh Mujib, the Armed escort accompanying me pulled me back commanding that I pick up my leftover tools and leave quickly. Sheikh Mujib looked at me, smiled and waved his hand. The image of Sheikh Mujib sitting on the chair and smiling is still fresh in my mind.



19

The War of 1971 and A Frightful Journey from Mianwali Tomultan

I wanted to meet Sheikh Mujeeb again but couldn't do so because of sudden change in the behavior of the jail staff and even the Pakistani inmates of the prison towards all the 'Sikhs' and the extraordinary deployment of heavily armed personnel around the cell. The deployment was as much to ensure the "Bongo bondhu's" safety as to prevent any interaction between him and any other inmates especially the 'Sikhs' (Indians). All I could manage was just a glimpse of him after 3-4 days when he was apparently being shifted to some other jail.

As we no longer had any access to Newspapers or Radio, we were at a loss to understand the reason behind the sudden chill in the behavior of the jail establishment and even the native prisoners. The mystery was solved by Baba Sher one day when he gave me details of the growing tension between Pakistan and India because of what Pakistan thought was a grandiose plan hatched by the Indians, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in particular, to dismember East Pakistan and violate the territorial integrity of their country. Because of this propaganda, Baba Sher told us, the jail staff and the native prisoners considered it their patriotic duty to boycott the 'Sikhs'.

From the graphic account Baba Sher narrated about the events leading up to the 'breaking point' I had no doubt that he was a better political analyst than the entire security establishment and think tanks of Pakistan put together. "Oye tum suna vo muhavra oye," Baba Sher said in his rustic Pathan accent, "Kumhar apna kumharin ko nahin peet sakta hai to vo bechara apna garib gadhe ka kan khainchne lagta oye." (Have you heard that popular saying, when a potter is helpless in getting tough with his wife he starts thrashing the poor donkey he

uses for transporting his wares.) "Everyone knows that the real problem is that the General (Yahya Khan) and Bhutto do not want to allow the Bengalis their due share of power as per democratic norms because of their larger population and the matching majority of MNAs (Members of National Assembly)," Baba Sher started elaborating in a unique mix of Hindustani and Punjabi with a Pushto accent. "Instead of solving their problems the General has let loose his soldiers on those poor Bengalis. Everyone in Pakistan is afraid of blaming Yahya and Bhutto—so all the 'Akhbarwallahs' are blaming India and Indira." "Vaise vo khatoon ka tasvir dekhne main bahut hasin lagta oye," (The lady looks beautiful in the photos) Baba Sher added with electrifying suddenness and realized equally promptly that his humor was perhaps a bit misplaced. "Ham makhol karta oye. Hamara vaste to khatoon behn ka mafik hota." (I am only joking. The lady is like a sister to me.)

Baba Sher's lighthearted banter couldn't delude us about the tension that had already gripped the jail atmosphere and the precautions we were required to be taken for our own safety. The local inmates who would normally pass broad smiles at us every time there was an eye contact, simply ignored and refused to even acknowledge our presence. Some had started showing downright belligerence by making faces and spitting in a gesture to spite us. The level of tension between the two countries became clear when Lumberdar Umar Khan lined up all of us in the barrack and gave detailed instructions on how to observe 'blackout' whenever the recently repaired siren on the observation tower of the jail started blowing for air raid warning. "You must not only switch off the light in your cell, but also cover the iron bars of the doors with your blankets or bed sheets. If you fail to obey, you may die in the air raid and even if you survive the jail administration will not leave you alive in that case," was the short and to the point warning Umar Khan gave in no uncertain terms. On our part we too took some decisions to ensure our personal safety. During mealtime all of us – 'Sikh' prisoners – decided in hushed voices that as far as possible we must avoid any movement outside our cells or barracks, even during the timings when such movement was permissible as per jail rules. In case of any emergency, when movement outside the cells or barrack became inevitable, we agreed to move in groups of 2 or 3 and not alone. If any warder comes to take any one of us alone on the pretext of orders, from senior

jail officers the concerned person must call out his cell inmate or the inmates of the nearby cells and inform that he is being taken irrespective of any orders to the contrary if given by the escort or warder. In case of any physical attack by any Pakistani prisoner the person attacked must scream loudly and call out the others for help.

While we were busy deciding our contingency plans war seemed to have actually broken out full scale just outside the high walls of the Jail. It so happened that the Mianwali airbase of the Pakistan Air Force was located which close vicinity of the jail that apparently was a legitimate and important target for the Indian Air Force in the event of a war breaking out between the two countries. Some time in September or October 1971 (I can not precisely recall the exact month) we noticed an unusually high number of daily sorties from the PAF base and had the gut feeling that some real fireworks could be in the offing. Same night, when we were about to call it a day the siren started shrieking eerily. Soon after, the deafening sound of anti-aircraft fire was preceded by the loud noise of some aircraft flying at low level. Within seconds the scene was weird and bizarre. We knew it was an air raid by the IAF and quickly started switching off lights and covering the doors of the cell with bed sheets, towels and even old newspapers. After about half an hour, there was another round of massive anti-aircraft gunfire and loud explosions. It was apparently a heavy aerial bombardment at the nearby PAF base. The jail building was rattled and smoke and dust was seen all around as if the area had been hit by a storm. We were scared and happy at once. Happy because of what looked like successful air raids by our Air Force and scared because of the possible retaliatory attacks by the Pakistani prisoners on our barracks.

We remained awake the whole night. Early in the morning, at around 6 a.m., Lumberdar Umarkhan came and warned that we should continue to remain inside our cells as more anti-aircraft guns were being fitted all along the outer wall of the jail, "Which we Sikh prisoners are not allowed to see." I was amazed at the simplicity of his innocent mind for disclosing to us what he was supposed to prevent us from knowing or seeing and couldn't help smiling even in those tense moments. It was around 7 a.m. and Umarkhan was still standing guard out side the cell to keep from us the knowledge of anti-aircraft guns being fitted all along

the outer wall when there was yet another wave of aerial bombing, followed by massive rapid fire bursts of the recently installed guns. The clouds of smoke and dust once again filled the barracks and Lumberdar Umarkhan started running for cover. The raid lasted for about half an hour and what we learnt afterwards from the grapevine was that no trace of the Mianwali PAF base was left.

We were victims of an irrational retaliation by the Pakistani prisoners as all services including the supply of water were snapped. Chief Warder Baba Sher couldn't tolerate this inhuman attitude of the authorities and the other prisoners. He restored the supply of water and service of tea to us at great personal risk from his fanatical colleagues. "Oye ghabrana nahin tumlog oye. Hum sab dekhta tumhara vaste," (Don't you worry. I am there to look after) Baba Sher said patronizingly. Calling me near the iron bars of the gate he whispered in my ear that some discussion was on between the authorities to have our group shifted to some other jail. I thanked him in equally low whispers for giving me classified information and advised the others in the group to be ready for the shifting. When nothing happened throughout the day, other members of the group started making fun of me because of the false alarm.

The order for our shifting came late in the evening. We were all lined up, handcuffed one by one and put into a waiting police van with heavily armed guards in escort. Luckily we were not blindfolded. No one bothered to inform us about the place we were heading for. Whenever some one from amongst us asked about the destination, he was hit mercilessly with the butts of weapons the guards were carrying. After a couple of hours of driving some of us wanted to urinate, but the request for stopping was not allowed, after which some of the colleagues started wetting their pants (salwars to be more precise.) I was sitting towards the end of the portion meant for the prisoners. It was adjoining the driver's cabin and there was a small wire meshed window through which I could communicate with the driver. I beseeched him to stop the van for a while to let the prisoners urinate, but immediately the guard sitting beside the driver ordered him to simply carry on. The driver was apparently a kindhearted person. He stopped the van and told the guard that he had to stop as he himself wanted to go for a leak. The stoppage came as a great relief to us. We could see the marks of anger and annoyance on the guard's

face but he kept quiet, perhaps waiting for a more opportune moment.

The bus drove practically non-stop all through the night. In the morning it stopped by a roadside shop selling tea, biscuits and *naan* as the escort team wanted to have their breakfast. All of us were also very exhausted because of the long journey and because we had had no food the previous night. We asked the guards to get us some tea at least, but they refused and instead started intimidating and abusing. We collected some money and called out to the shopkeeper asking him to give us tea. He had hardly turned back after taking the money when we saw a frenzied mob of 100-150 villagers carrying lathis and stones and shouting anti-India slogans, charging towards us. The driver who was leisurely taking tea jumped into the van followed by the guards. Very soon we had become part of a hair-raising scene from some high class action thriller movie. The mob was chasing the van throwing lathis and stones at the windowpanes and the windscreen. Some stones landed on the driver's face and head from the side window and blood was oozing out. Not caring for his own safety he left the main road and started driving zigzag in the fields to skirt the stones and somehow overtook the frenzied mob. In the prisoners' cabin we were all tossing as if in a ship sailing at breakneck speed in the choppy waters of a rough sea. When stones started hitting some of us the driver looked back briefly and shouted that we put our heads down to escape being hit. The ordeal lasted for 15-20 minutes after which the driver emerged from the narrow tracks and took to the main road again. He stopped the van, got down and quickly inspected the tyres and the bonnet of the engine to see if any thing required fixing.

The driver enlightened us about the fracas we had just witnessed. As we were waiting for the tea at the roadside stall word spread in the nearby village that the van was carrying some 'Sikhs.' Because of the mass hysteria built up in the countryside due to the ongoing Indo-Pak war, the mob had thought it was their patriotic duty to contribute in their own way in the war efforts, of their country and attack the Indians. "But how could the villagers know that we were Indians," one of us asked. Instead of replying directly, the driver thumped his hand on the seat by his side where the constable who was objecting to the bus being stopped to enable the prisoners to urinate was sitting earlier. The seat was now vacant.

Obviously the constable had quietly slipped in to the village to mobilize the villagers for the attack. He might not have anticipated the exemplary alertness and humanity shown by the the driver in saving his passengers from the frenzied mob because of which the van sped off even before the mischief monger could come on board. The driver also told that we were headed for the Multan Central Jail, as Mianwali was considered unsuitable for keeping us due to its proximity to the border with India.

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Turbulent Times Again: Multan Central Jail

We reached Multan central jail at around 9 AM. The van drove straight into the jail compound past the huge main entrance where a posse of jail staff and armed guards were already waiting for the new inmates from Mianwali. Our names were called out and we were asked to walk down one by one. Some Lumberdars present at the scene were ordered to carryout a thorough body search of each one of us in a temporary enclosure made of gunny bags, where we were asked to take off our clothes to make sure that nothing objectionable was concealed underneath. Bar-fetters were put on each one and the group was lodged in a barrack meant for condemned prisoners awaiting execution. It was a double storied barrack with 12 cells on each floor. The ground floor had Pakistani convicts sentenced to death and our group was put in cells on the first floor. Two Indians, Ashok Kumar from Pathankot and Rajinder Kumar of Jammu, were already there when we reached. Both claimed to be IB operatives captured while they were carrying out their assignments inside Pakistan. Next day we were all produced before the Jail Superintendent for 'mulehza' and lo and behold, the Superintendent was none other than the notorious Mr. Jahangir Khan Hotiana. He recognised me and promptly instructed the Lumberdar to put me in a separate 'isolation cell'. "Ainnu horaan taun dur rakhna ainu rahnumaikarn di bimari hai," (Keep him in isolation from others. He is suffering from the disease of assuming leadership over others.) was Mr.Hotiana's curt order.

With Mr. Hotiana at the helm, life in the jail couldn't be anything but tough. The day started with a meager serving of 'chana-gurh' (roasted gram and jaggery) and it was up to you what you preferred to call it, breakfast or lunch. The 'mushakat' (labor) given to each inmate was pounding 10 kg of twigs into 'munj' each day that

was no different from any other jail, but here the pounding had to be done with bare hands without any pounding tool or implement and that precisely was Mr. Hotiyana's signature. Our wrists and palms became stiff with pain as we kept of thrashing the twigs on the bare floor of the cell within just 15-20 minutes and by evening the pain radiated all over the arms. Pounding the whole lot of 10 kg with bare hands was humanly impossible and to avoid being beaten by the Lumberdars and other jail staff in the event of the task remaining incompleted, the inmates would hit upon novel, unusual and sometimes inpractice ideas. Within one hour the barracks would look like a lunatic asylum with some inmates jumping on the bundle of twigs as if dancing in a trance with others trying to crush the twigs by rolling their arms from their elbows down to the wrists. While none could succeed in crushing all of the 10 kgs, most ended up falling sick with high fever or acute body ache due to sheer physical fatigue. One of the inmates, Sachitanand of Una (then Punjab and now in Himachal Pradesh), who once tried to help a sick colleague out of sympathy was beaten red and blue for indulging in 'rahnumai'. He was thrashed publicly so that others could be taught a lesson. This however couldn't make any dent in our sense of camaraderie and we continued to help the sick and needy. For those who fell sick there was no succor as no medicines could be given without the prescription recommended the jail's resident medical officer (RMO) whose visits to the jail were only fortnightly. Even after the RMO's visit, the only medicines given were only Aspirins and Sulfagulodines and occasionally some cough syrup would also be distributed; that too was diluted with water so that the RMO and other jail administrators could make some money by showing more purchases than what actually reached the jail stores.

Just opposite our barrack there was a stone structure that looked like a mini open-air theatre. After I had forged some kind of a working relationship with the Lumberdar over sporadic informal sessions of religious discourse and political discussions, I was told that it was indeed a mini theatre built through 'mushakat' (inmates' labor) during the tenure of Mr. Dahar, the previous Jail Superintendent. Mr. Dahar was a colorful person who apart from being fond of dance and music was also an incorrigible homosexual. During his rounds of the barracks he would select the inmates who had cute and delicate looks. At night they used to be quietly

whisked away by some lumberdars who were the superintendent's confidants and delivered at his residence for nightlong amorous activities. Soon after the activity ceased to be private as Mr. Dahar had a full-fledged harem of his male keeps, some of who were good singers or dancers. As his private residential apartment was not large enough for these gatherings, Mr. Dahar was advised by his cronies to utilize the 'mushakat' for making a proper enclosure where the artists had sufficient space to perform properly. It also suited the cronies who were mostly lumberdars (euphemism for senior prisoners sentenced to long terms in jail) as they too could enjoy the fun which was not possible if their job remained confined to just delivering the cuties to Mr. Dahar's residence.

The particular spot opposite the condemned barracks was selected for the mini theatre as it was in a secluded corner where the Superintendent and his select group of favorites could enjoy the performances undisturbed and unnoticed by the other inmates of the prison. The Lumberdar who had had sneak views of the colorful nights a few times started giggling like a schoolgirl while recalling what he had witnessed. The performances started a little after the lights out time in the barracks when the 'male keeps' of the superintendent used to be taken out by the trusted lumberdars. Mr. Dahar and his select group of friends used to be already seated. The guests sometimes included senior police officers posted in Multan or nearby and at least once the 'DC saab' (Deputy Commissioner of the area who for all purposes is the Government on the spot as per the scheme of administration devised by the British during their rule which has remained completely unchanged to date in the entire subcontinent) was also present. From what the Lumberdar had been able to witness, the events started as pure and simple artistic performances almost veered towards shameless sexual orgies as the night advanced. By the time these ended in the early hours of the morning, the performers and the audience would pair together for all kinds of imaginable or even unimaginable perverted sexual-practices. It made one sick to hear about the orgies but what was more sickening was the total lack of human sensitivity displayed by the Superintendent and his friends. At less than the proverbial stone's throw from these orgies were the condemned prisoners' cells in which some unfortunate fellow human beings marked their time in extreme agony waiting for their execution. I found it impossible to think of a more inhuman irony.

"Where is Mr. Dahar now?" I asked. "In this very jail, in that barrack," the Lumberdar replied pointing towards a row of barracks. "He is serving time for a life sentence given by the District Judge." I was taken aback by the unexpected reply. The male keeps of Mr. Dahar and his select group of cohorts had become a privileged lot on whom the jail rules and discipline simply didn't apply. This led to resentment and frustration amongst the rank and file. When requests made to Mr. Dahar for justice and a fair deal evoked no response, the prisoners duly supported by the majority of jail staff revolted. Mr. Dahar ordered the guards to open fire in which many hapless protestors were injured and at least one died on the spot. After trial in the district court the Sessions judge sentenced the colorful jail superintendent to life imprisonment. Poetic justice indeed!

Our ordeal of pounding 'munji' with bare hands didn't last long as Mr. Hotiana was transferred a few days after our arrival at the Multan jail. The new jailor Sheikh Ehsan Ghani was a true Muslim; a kind-hearted man. He ordered the bar-fetters to be removed from all of us as there were clear instructions in the jail manual about the kind of prisoners who could be fettered and the rules didn't say that a prisoner should be fettered just because he happens to be a 'Sikh'. He also stopped the practice of crushing 'munji' by bare hands. The jail doctor was told to attend the dispensary regularly and attend to whosoever needed medical attention at anytime of the day or night. The lumberdars and warders too were told to give up their old habit of thrashing any prisoner without any rhyme or reason and there was perceptible improvement in the quality as well as quantity of food served to the inmates. Restrictions put on our movements within the barracks or interaction with the other inmates in the same barrack even in the absence of any such provision in the jail manual was removed. "I shall not give you any liberty that is not provided for in the rules," Sheikh Ehsan Ghani had announced forcefully in an assembly of the prisoners called by him and added equally forcefully, "I shall also not subject you to any restrictions that are not supported by rules."

Under the new dispensation, my isolation ordered by Mr. Hotiana came to an end and I could not only move within the barrack but also speak to the other inmates.

Taking advantage of my newly granted freedom one day I came across an inmate not seen earlier in our barrack. He was a strikingly handsome young man with the bright complexion that no one except Kashmiris can boast of in the whole world. He was crying, apparently in great pain and was kept on drip by the jail doctor. I went near him and greeted softly saying 'salam walequm'. "Walequm Salam birather," he replied struggling to bring a feeble smile on his face. Over the next 2-3 days we came closer to each other and he started confiding in me. He was Hashim Qureshi, a Kashmiri youth who fell victim to the Pakistani agencies' campaign of misinformation and disinformation against India. A bright young man with a sharp mind, Hashim was prepared by the agencies in Pakistan to hijack an Indian civil aircraft 'to draw the world's attention to the Kashmir issue'. After the Indian plane hijacked by him landed in Lahore he was accorded a hero's welcome. ZA Bhutto who personally received him at Lahore Airport led the procession that took him through the main market of Lahore to the State Guest House where a public reception was arranged to felicitate him.

Hashim felt that he was cheated by the ISI and put in jail on the pretext that the Government of Pakistan was under a legal obligation to abide by the international treaty against hijacking. Hashim had frequent mood swings from being emotional to analytical. When emotional, he appeared intensely repentant for what he had done under sheer misguidance from the Pakistani agencies and was very nostalgic about his 'home' in Kashmir. Whenever he was in an analytical mood he would give what he considered to be little known inside information about the designs the CIA and ISI had against India and Indira (Gandhi). During one such session he claimed to be privy to some secret planning done jointly by the CIA and the ISI to 'eliminate' Indira Gandhi. If I was to believe Hashim, the strategy was to whip up anti-Indira sentiments through a pincer plan. On the one hand a particular political party was cultivated by funding through the CIA to campaign against the lady and at the same time a senior leader of the Congress party was being prepared to part ways and leave the Congress party. Hashim also believed he had credible information that the CIA had already penetrated the Congress Party and that her political elimination could be a prelude to the physical. What Hashim told was also corroborated by Niaz Bhatti, a one-time confidant of ZA Bhutto who

was lodged in the same jail due to souring relations with his mentor. (The security personnel shot Niaz Bhatti at point blank range inside the jail right before my eyes after a few days. More on Niaz Bhatti later.)

From whatever little we could know in the jail, Pakistan was witnessing large-scale public disturbances and jails across the country were getting filled with grass root level political workers in the name of maintenance of law and order. Multan Jail had its more than fair share of political detainees. While the streets were still abuzz with political protests, ZA Bhutto became the Prime Minister of the country after General Yahya Khan stepped down. It was said that when Bhutto himself was incarcerated during the Ayub era he had promised the release and remission to the prisoners held in Pakistani jails across the country, if and when he became the head of state or government in Pakistan. Now that he had become the Prime Minister, the inmates of Multan central jail, particularly the political detainees were demanding their release as per the promises made by him. To begin with they gave a written appeal and when there was no response some of them went on a hunger strike. These protests were reportedly masterminded and being led by Niaz Bhatti. He managed to unite all the inmates—political as well as others – against the authorities and persuaded them to defy orders. A small scuffle took place one day in one of the barracks over rations. The administration called in additional forces that mercilessly beat up all the inmates of the disturbed barrack and took a number of harsh measures against them by way of punishment. Instead of quelling the revolt, the harsh measures aggravated the situation and the rebellion spread in the entire prison making it impossible for the administration to control the situation. The prisoners including the condemned ones were freely moving throughout the jail campus, abusing and intimidating the lumberdars and warders and helping each other remove the bar-fetters and open the locks of cells. The prison administration came to be fully controlled by the prisoners and the authorities were completely helpless. The only feat the prisoners failed to achieve was to unlock the main gate and flee, but inside the jail it is the they and not the authorities who were fully in command.

The authorities retaliated by cutting off the water supply and denying replenishment of rations. In a few days things went from bad to worse as there

was neither food nor water and the inmates were starving. Thre was no water to drink except for the little left in the earthen pitchers in some barracks and some dirty water flowing in the open drains. Word must have spread about the plight of the prisoners in the city and some relatives of the local prisoners started arriving at the main gate with oversized tiffin boxes full of food for their near and dear ones. As no such facility was available to the Indians, our plight was the worst. Most of us had become weak due to starvation and some had already started drinking small quantities of the dirty water from the open drains and vomiting. Our weaklong starvation was ended when one day Rajinder Kumar joined the native Pakistani prisoners in a raid on the ration store and brought some wheat in his shirt that was turned into an improvised carry bag. We made a small fire from some old papers, including the sheets on which I had made some jottings for my memoirs and roasted the grains. It felt no less than a grand treat. Niaz Bhatti organized a public meeting in the jail compound where most of the Pakistani prisoners were present. He delivered a hard-hitting speech blaming ZA Bhutto for the cessation of East Pakistan and birth of Bangladesh and risking the lives of more than 90,000 Pakistani POWs in Indian custody. Referring to Indira Gandhi he used foul, abusive language and declared that he was in touch with some highly placed ISI functionaries who had told him that our agents who were already in India had established contact with some senior members of the Congress party and some heavy weights belonging to the opposition from UP and Bihar to have Indira Gandhi thrown out of office. "Very soon you will see how that lady is thrown out by her own men," he thundered to great applause from his audience. The jail staff simply watched the tamasha from a distance.

I mingled with the local prisoners to attend the meeting and heard the entire speech delivered by Niaz Bhatti. After returning to the barrack I discussed the situation with other cellmates. We were all agreed that the popular mood in Pakistan was of extreme hatred for India and the inmates of the jail were no exception because of which the Indian prisoners had to be careful about their personal safety. It was decided that we should remain inside our cells in spite of the freedom available to all due to total collapse of authority in the jail. Rajinder Gupta who was seen mixing with the Pakistani inmates stunned us by disclosing

that he had been approached by a condemned Pakistani prisoner to join them in digging a tunnel to escape from the jail and that he had actually joined the group. The tunnel was being dug near the abandoned mini theatre that was just about 10 feet away from the outer wall. In fact nearly half the length of the proposed tunnel had been already completed. The mouth of the tunnel was camouflaged by keeping a number of scriptures including the Holy Koran for cover and whenever digging was going on one of the inmates would sit there and start reading the Holy Koran loudly. We all felt alarmed and scared and advised Rajinder to immediately dissociate himself from this dangerous exercise. In case the misadventure comes to the notice of the authorities, the Pakistani prisoners may be let off lightly, but as far as the Indians were concerned they will be simply shot and killed, we pleaded with Rajinder who agreed to to stop going for the digging from that very moment.

Niaz Bhatti seemed quite encouraged by the massive turnout and loud cheers in the meeting he had organized in the jail compound. On hearing from some of his supporters that there was a huge media gathering including the BBC correspondent just outside the jail, he decided to take advantage of the media's presence so near the jail. He, accompanied by a good number of prisoners climbed up to the terrace of the barrack from where he held a press conference and declared that he would persuade the prisoners to call off the agitation if Mr. Bhutto or Mr. Kasoori who had joined Bhutto as his Home Minister, came to the jail for a dialogue with the protestors. Mr. Kasoori was also Bhutto's Law Minister. The gimmick paid off as just after three days Mr. Kasoori came calling to the jail. All the prisoners were gathered in the compound and after a fiery speech Niaz Bhatti handed over a list of demands to Mr. Kasoori who in turn assured to consider the demands sympathetically and appealed to the prisoners to return to the barracks and obey the rules so that normalcy was restored. He asked Niaz Bhatti to make a similar appeal but Niaz refused flatly and made it clear that the agitation shall not be called off until and unless the demands were first met. Mr.Kasoori left immediately thereafter.

The way Mr.Kasoori left in a huff after Niaz Bhatti turned down his request for making an appeal to the prisoners to call off the agitation left no doubt in our mind

that some stern action could be expected shortly. It came sooner than we had expected. Early next morning at about 6 or 6.30 A.M. the jail was reverberating with sounds of machine gun fire from all sides. It was a cover fire to facilitate the entry of Pakistan Rangers in the jail. They first captured the central watchtower and started shooting and throwing the rebels down from the 30 or 40 feet high structure to instill fear in the minds of others. After capturing the tower they installed a machine gun atop. The Rangers then fanned out to the adjoining terraces and started shooting indiscriminately, instantly killing the rebels. Next came the turn of the barracks on the ground floor. While every inmate was thrashed roundly with lathis, the ringleaders were handed over to the commander who shot them with his own pistol. I saw Niaz Bhatti walk down to the commander perhaps to confront him but was immediately shot dead at point blank range. The commander personally did the shooting.

When we saw the Rangers marching towards our cells on the first floor, we ran and bolted the cells from inside. A large number of Rangers gathered in front of our cells and ordered us to come out one by one and assemble in front of the mini theatre facing the mouth of the freshly dug tunnel. We had no option but to silently obey. When every one lined up, the Commander of the Rangers ordered his men to open machine gun fire and 'finish the kafirs'. Everyone was stunned. Though no one in the group cried openly, some of us had started sobbing, hiding their faces behind their palms and at least 2-3 fell down unconscious. The speed of thoughts crossing my mind was much faster than the speed of light. In a fraction of a nano second I had the recollection of my family, friends and those whom I had reason to consider as my enemies. Unlike on previous such occasions, the images of the dying dove chick didn't cross my mind, but the sobbing face of my mother did. Instead of pathos or bravado, my mind was full of equanimity and tranquil resignation to my fate.

It was in the midst of such horrendous moments that we saw an angel standing right in front of us. It was no apparition. The angel was there in flesh and blood. He was Sheikh Ehsan Ghani, the Jail Superintendent who succeeded the notorious Jahangir Khan Hotiana. Sheikh Ehsan swiftly jumped and stood right next to the barrel of the gun and shouted, "Yeh kaam tum sirf meri laash pe hi kar sakogai,"

(Over my dead body). The commander of the Rangers was incensed. "Are these kafirs dearer to you than your own countrymen? You didn't throw such tantrums when I was mowing down the Pakistani prisoners. Where were you when I myself shot that rascal Niaz Bhatti with this very pistol" the Commander asked angrily holding the pistol upward and blowing slowly in its barrel. "Do you know I have been given full powers by the government to deal with the situation the way I deem fit and that empowers me to detain and even shoot you," the Commander thundered. Sheikh Ehsan was unfazed. "I have come on the scene just now and wasn't present when you say you mowed down my Pakistani prisoners including Niaz Bhatti. I shall definitely report that to the government when I get back to my office but I shall not let you shoot any one unless you first shoot me." Sheikh Ehsan paused for a while and added, "Do you know Commander that the world media including the BBC is camping right next to the outer wall. If you really want to shoot me, go ahead but before that let me order my staff to open the main gate so that what you and your men do is also seen by the press." Lowering the pitch, the Jailor turned a little persuasive and pleaded with the Commander that any shooting of the Indians will put the lives of our 90000 soldiers who are POWs in Indian custody in great peril. The media shall cover the event with every single detail and the Indians are sure to retaliate. "Forget the law and humanity, just think of this," Sheikh Ehsan argued with the Rangers' Commander and had his way. The deal settled was that all of us shall be put on bar-fetters and lodged in cell number 1 and 3 meant for the condemned prisoners. The jail staff shall be given strict instructions to treat us exactly like the condemned ones awaiting execution. In practical terms it meant that we could have no freedom of movement except for being allowed to sit near the 'jangla' (the grilled door) from 7A.M to 5 P.M. The cell was not to be opened under any circumstances even for urinating or defecating. "Tatti pishab di gall chhaddo, je andar agg vi lagjaye te inhan kafiraan nu sad ke mar jaan devo lekin darwaja na kholo," (Forget latrine and toilet, even if a fire breaks out let these infidels be burnt to death but don't open the door of the cell), was the stern directive from the Commander.

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Back to Mianwali

Sheikh Ehsan seemed to have agreed to these exaggerated demands of compliance from the Commander only to get rid of him without much ado as gradually normalcy returned to the jail in every respect including removal of extra curbs imposed on the 'Sikhs'. In fact life became easier after a few days. The whiff of freedom was partly due to Sheikh Ehsan Ghani, but partly also due to the developments between the two countries on the diplomatic front. After 15-20 days we were told that our group was to be shifted back to Mianwali Central Jail. It was also rumored that Indian prisoners from all over Pakistan were being collected in Mianwali.

Return to Mianwali was like a second homecoming for the group. We also had a surprise in store. Instead of the usual 'istakbal' by five lashes, this time there was a proper reception and those waiting to welcome us were not just the lumberdars and local Pakistani inmates of the jail. There was a group of Indian prisoners transferred to Mianwali from other Pakistani jails like Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, etc. Notable among the group welcoming us was Mohan Lall Bhaskar (another MI operative captured in Pakistan prior to us) and Vasdev, reportedly from the MI. There were also some detainees who were incarcerated without any specific charges.

Lumberdar Umar Khan seemed to be the happiest person on our return to Mianwali. "Oye Khushamdeid mera bachcha, khushamdeid," (welcome my child welcome!), he said holding me in a tight hug affectionately, "Mera murammat panja fir se abaad hoyega." (My maintenance gang can be revived now.) The 'punja' had the old hands with Gulzar, Pishora and Sansari as the lead members. Mohan lall Bhaskar, and Upinder and Bhullar, both IB operatives, also joined us. The immediate task given for the 'punja' this time was whitewashing the muddy

walls of a part of the jail known as 'kuchchi jail'. There (in the kuchchi jail) I met another Indian prisoner whose name was Kashmira Singh, a Havildar of the BSF who had strayed into Pakistani territory by mistake and was sentenced to seven years in jail.

During our interaction with the fellow Pakistani prisoners we came to know that there were many Indian prisoners in the Attuck fort. Some of these prisoners had reportedly become mentally deranged due to prolonged separation from their home and hearth and possibly also due to torture inflicted upon them by the agencies. One day when the punja was busy white washing an enclosure, Lumberdar Umar Khan came and asked me to report to the main office. Some Indian prisoners had been brought from other jails and I was required to accommodate them in our 'Sikh barrack'. When I approached the Durban he handed over 4 prisoners, all of whom were mentally deranged. "They are 'paagal' (mad) and unable to even tell their name or address properly", the Durban said adding derisively that they were a nuisance and as no one in the jail was willing to suffer them, it was decided to put them in the 'Sikh barrack'. I brought them to the barrack. From their deportment and mannerism it appeared that two of them must have been commissioned officers in the Armed Forces, but they were looking badly famished and perhaps had no food for quite some time. On a request made by me Umar Khan was kind enough to arrange for some *daal* and *chapattis*. The 'paagals' simply pounced on the food, leaving us in no doubt that they had seen food after a long gap.

Out of deference to what we thought could be their pre-arrest status, we decided not to compel them for 'mushakat.' One of them who used to mostly talk to himself in Bengali which none of us understood fully, finally managed to teach me one sentence that I could understand and also repeat in proper Bengali accent, making our new colleague very happy. "Tomar baari kothaaye," (Where is your home) he would ask me to which I would promptly reply, "Punjab." He would be visibly happy that I could understand the Bengali language, but the next moment when I asked him, "Tumi bolo, tomar baari kothaaye, (Now you tell me where is your home) he would become sad and start, crying without replying to me. (Much later, when after release, from Pakistan, my sister took me to visit a senior officer of HMT in Pinjore, I was shown a photograph and asked if I had seen the person

during my captivity in Pakistan. I realized it was the same person who used to ask me "tomar baadi kothaaye".) He was Maj. Ghosh of the Indian Army, who was declared missing since the Indo-Pak war of 1965. In Mianwali jail Major Ghosh would address me as Captain and often ask, "Captain *saab*, give me a cigarette". As I was a non-smoker I didn't have cigarettes, but with the help of Umar Khan I started keeping some cigarettes ready in my pocket for him and offered one whenever he demanded. The mystery of the other 'pagal' was also solved much later when in a TV program on 'Sab TV' a lady showed me the photograph of her husband, an officer of Indian Air Force who too had been missing since the 1965 war. He was Flt Lt. Thumbi.

It is a pity that at the time of our release from Pakistan these two 'pagal prisoners' were returned to Pakistan from Wagha border as the Indian side refused to accept them because they couldn't give details of their name and address in India. It didn't occur to any of our officials that a mentally deranged person simply doesn't remember the details the and question of his giving the same on demand to the authorities doesn't arise. Some of the methods of torture adopted by the Pakistani agencies were so horrendous that even a person with strongest possible will power might not be able to withstand and could either breakdown or go mad. These brave hearts apparently didn't breakdown and had therefore suffered mental derangement. (We learnt from some Pakistani officials that in certain cases the interrogators dumped their victims in underground isolation cells and if a person remained there for one week he would surely come out fully mad). Whenever I recall these unfortunate souls and the time I spent with them in Mianwali, I can't help crying bitterly for their plight. I also feel sorry and even guilty that during my brief stay with them in Mianwali jaii I couldn't succeed in eliciting their whereabouts in India inspite of best efforts.

The professional reputation of our 'murammat punja' had spread far and wide because of the experience we had gained over the years and also because of the dedication with which the members worked. Seeing the quality of our work, the Jail Superintendent wanted his office chamber to be color-washed by us even though he had the choice of getting the work done by professionals from the open market. When I appeared before Choudhry Nazir Ahmad, he took out

a small piece of fabric (perhaps he wanted for the curtains) from his pocket and asked if my group could arrange to give exactly the same color to the walls in his room. As the walls were of mud, it was difficult to make any color stick to them. The muddy material used for making the walls also tended to change the hue of the paint making it difficult to get any shade with precision, but I agreed to try my level best and achieve the feat. We took it as a challenge and delivered far beyond what the jailor could expect. Chowdhry Nazir was so happy with our work that he offered chairs for all of us to sit and ordered the lumberdar to get us some sweets and tea. Next morning we were again called for by him and he announced that because of the excellent work done by the 'punja' he had granted 15 days' remission to me and 7 days' remission to each member of the group. The remission was duly recorded on our jail tickets.

22

Silverline on the Horizon

Chief Warder Baba Sher and Lumberdar Umarkhan were friendly souls since the beginning, but a perceptible change in the behavior of other jail staff and most of the native prisoners were indication of a thaw in the chill. Having lived in Pakistani prisons for a considerable time by now, we were aware that such change of behavior at the micro—level often reflects the macro—level improvement in ties between the two countries. We were also getting vague and unconfirmed reports from various quarters that an agreement had been arrived at between India and Pakistan for repatriation of Indian prisoners in Pakistan or for an exchange of prisonersr between the two sides. Our hopes took shape one day when I was told by the warder to prepare two separate lists of pre (1971) war and post–war Indian prisoners in the Mianwali central jail. After I handed over the lists the pre–war detainees were told to be, ready to move to another destination at short notice.

The very next day, detainees in that category numbering about 40-45 were called to the main office early in the morning. Their bar-fetters were removed one by one and surprisingly the jail staff and the lumberdars doing the job started uttering words of sympathy to those of us who had developed gashing wounds due to continous rubbing of the fetters on thighs and ankles. Even the Compounder from the jail dispensary was there offering ointment to such persons. We were handed over whatever meager 'personal belongings' we had deposited in the jail office at the time of our arrival and told to get into the waiting jail van ready to take us to Kotlakhpat jail. Everything happened so suddenly that we didn't know how to react to the situation or express our joy and gratitude to the jail staff for being so nice and corteous.

As we were being lined up for barding the police van, I saw Lumberdar Umarkhan

staring blankly at the departing caravan, looking completely rundown, standing all by himself in a corner. I sought the warder's permission to meet Umarkhan to bid him good-bye before finally departing from the jail. Each one of us hugged and embraced Umarkhan with the affection and respect generally reserved only for immediate family members and close relatives. The proud Pathan that Umarkhan was, he didn't want to be seen crying but emotions were running so high that he couldn't fight back the flood of tears. "Oye, humlog bure waqton mein milethe oye! Insha Allah kabhi achchhe waqton mein phir milenge," (We met in our bad times. God willing we shall meet again in good times also). He kept on repeating each time someone from the group approached him to bid good-bye.

I was the last one in the group to meet Umarkhan. He had been our sole benefactor in the jail in the worst of times we faced in an alien land. Whenever some of us fell sick or was depressed, Umarkhan consoled us as if he were a member of our own family. A good Muslim, he felt concerned for everyone around with the broadmindedness Pathans are well known for. Out of deep respect I had for this wonderful human being, I spontaneously bent down to touch his feet. Umarkhan lifted me up and hugging me in tight embrace said, "Jadon apne watan jaye te apne abba ammi nu mera salam bolna oye," (When you get back home give my respects to your parents.) Wiping tears from my face with his own hands he looked straight in my eyes and said, "Apne watan ja ke Umarkhan ko bhoolega to nahin oye," (Don't forget Umarkhan after you back to your home.) As I stood assuring Umarkhan, "Ai ho sakda hai kade," (How can that be possible) the warder nudged me to remind that it was time to move. We couldn't "meet in good times" as Umarkhan had expected when we were bidding him good-bye but wherever he be, I wish to tell him, "Umarkhan! I have not forgotten you. And yes my dear! I did convey your Salam to my ammi but not to abba as abba had already passed away from this world before I reached home."

I do not remember the precise dates but perhaps it was sometime in the middle of 1973 that we reached Kotlakhpat jail. Kotlakhpat was a known place but this time it looked totally different from our previous visit. On arrival we were told that we were not prisoners any longer. Instead we were part of a transit camp being held in the jail premises directly under aegis of the Red Cross (ICRC) and controlled

by the Swiss embassy in Pakistan that was looking after the affairs of the ICRC in Pakistan at that time. The jail administration was to act only as facilitator to help the Swiss embassy do the paperwork and any other forms of administrative support that they might need.

23

The Party Begins

Over the years we had become used to being in the company of detainees who were either MI or IB operatives captured, tortured and interred by the Pakistani agencies. In fact most of us thought that there were no other categories of Indian prisoners in Pakistan. The transit camp at Kotlakhpat proved us wrong. The total number of persons here was close to 200 and majority of them were fishermen from Kerala and the coastal areas of Gujrat. Some of them had ventured out in to the sea with their whole family and were captured by the Pakistani agencies for fishing in 'their sea'. There was Bashir Ahmad alongwith his son Usnman, a sprightly young lad and his Begum, coy and shy like any other woman of her age from rural Gujrat on either side of the border. The family was shy and private to the extreme. They didn't want others to know what the three of them were talking to each other and everytime someone came within their audible distance they switched over to talking in fluent Arabic so that no one else could follow. Then there were some Christian fishermen from Kerala going by popular Keralite Christian names such as John, Mathew, Peter and even Abu. They were simple folk who couldn't understand how the sea could be theirs or ours and kept on repeating that they were honest people and not thieves. In their pure and pristine minds it wasn't clear at all why a person should be thrown in jail if all that he or she was doing was just fishing in the sea. "You put thieves in prisons not fishermen, unless they have stolen someone else's catch and by God sir we didn't steal the catch. The catch was our own," the Keralite fishermen would plead whenever the Swiss embassy staff visited the camp.

It was perhaps on the 9th or 10th May that some senior functionaries of the Swiss embassy asked the Jail Superintendent to suggest 1 or 2 volunteers from amongst the detainees who could help them complete the paper work. Since our

group had already been in Kotlakhpat and the jail staff was acquainted with us, the Superintendent suggested Bhim Sen and me for the job. Same evening the Superintendent addressed all inmates of the camp where both of us (Bhimsen and I) were introduced and the inmates were told to cooperate in letting us complete the paper work as per the Swiss embassy's requirement. The inmates were also told to contact us in case of any problem. Before finishing the Superintendent made it clear that his role and the role of his staff vis-à-vis the camp was limited only to ensuring the maintenance of order and not that of a jailor. For administrative arrangements the Swiss embassy had the over-all control of the camp and that the two of us (Bhimsen and me) were the representatives of the embassy.

The days that followed were full of fun, frolick and of course a lot of paper work for Bhimsen and myself. In their first visit to the camp after the Jail Superintendent's public address, a group of Swiss embassy officials came with a mini truck full of clothes, biscuits and some delicious swiss chocolates to be distributed among the inmates. Everyone felt like it was a different world altogether as none of the inmates had seen clothes (other than the depressingly shabby and ill fitting jail uniforms) eversince we were detained in different jails in Pakistan. The biscuits (and the crunchy, crispy biscuits made in a swiss bakery at that) were simply out of this world. Bhimsen recalled the difficult times we passed through in Multan jail when Jahangir Khan Hotiana was still at the helm. An inmate of the 'Sikh barrack' had developed high fever due to crushing 'munji' with bare hands for a whole day. He was feeling hungry but as his system had become weak due to fever, he couldn't digest the 'Gur-chana'. When some of us requested the warder to give one or two biscuits for him, what we got was a string of foul abuses and a hard slap. "Aijail hai haramjade, kafir tera nanka nahin haije etthe tenu nankhatai milsi," (It is jail you bastard. It is not your granny's home where you would get biscuits) was the rude response of the warder besides a hard slap in the face. All of us were wonderstruck at such massive change of times. It happened entirely on its own, as we had neither bargained for the bad times we had in jails nor made any efforts for the improved lot that we now had. Wasn't this precisely what you call luck?

After a week or so the Swiss team came with a huge number of post cards and reams of plain paper. The post cards were to be distributed to the inmates so that

they could write to their families back home. We were also instructed to make a list containing comprehensive details such as name, father's name, address in India, family details, date of arrest in Pakistan, details of allegations/offences charged with, sentences passed and time already served, etc. for each inmate in addition to details of personal physical appearance such as height, facial features, color of eyes and hair, et al. Some specially designed cards containing columns for these details were distributed to the inmates for filling then up and returning then to Bhimsen or me and the list to be prepared by us was to be as per these details. It was a tall order as some of the inmates—particularly the fishermen—were not literate enough to fill up the information cards and some amongst the IB and MI operatives had suffered memory loss and other forms of mental derangement due to intense torture and prolonged incarceration. The 'pagals' who had joined us at Mianwali proved to be the most difficult customers as no amount of coaxing, cajoling or threats could persuade them to open up. The Bengali, (Maj. Ghosh as I later learnt) instead of giving out any details about himself, simply kept on repeating "tomar badi kothaye"and the other one (Flt.Lt.Thumbe as I got to know from his photograph later on) would simply stare and smile at us or occasionally gesticulate angrily whenever Bhimsen and I approached him to let us record the details of his family back in India. (Out of 4, I could identify only these two after I returned toIndia. Identity of the other two has remained an unsolved mystery to date, even though we had no doubt that they too were Indians, probably from our security forces or intelligence agencies.)

Eventhough Bhimsen and I were selected by the Jail administration to help the Swiss embassy in completing the paperwork, the task could be completed only because of the combined efforts of all. The embassy staff was all praise for the devotion and sincerety with which the task was completed. Perhaps while devising the format of the information cards they had included some details which they themselves considered difficult to elicit or compile and were even mentally prepared to do without and were pleasantly surprised when they saw nothing missing. It was clear to us that the information was being compiled to facilitate our repatriation back to India and after handing over the list we had been impatiently waiting to hear the ultimate good news. When nothing came by

for more than 2-3 months, desperation once again gripped the inmates. The MI and IB operatives being of the toughened hardcore variety could maintain their calm, but the fishermen seemed at their wits end. They wouldn't have their meals properly and would often lapse into silence and brooding.

It was in such gloomy atmosphere that a grand gala cultural event was arranged by the jail authorities to celebrate 'UN Day'. Some of the regular inmates serving time in the jail were also allowed to join the audience. The star of the evening was Inayat Hussain Bhatti, a popular Pakistani artist well known for some of the most hilarious songs he had sung for Pakistani (Punjabi) films. A versatile artist, Inayat Bhtti had also acted in popular Punjabi films like *Chan Makhna*, *Sajjan Piyara*, *Jind Jan*, etc. In 1974 films like *Dharti de lal*, *Challenge*, *Rano* and *Saja-e-Mout* to name just a few were hits largely because of his melodius songs. When he started his famous number 'Husan walian da yaro yaraana bura hunda hai' (from the film *challenge*) every one in the audience started dancing. While I was staying in Hotel New Majestic, Lahore (in 1966) I had heard a touching song that Inayat had sung for the film *Mon Zor*. Salamat Tufail composed its music and Nazar Hussain Bhatti wrote the lyric. The song was, 'Rabba kithe son gaya garibaan noo banake.' (God where have you gone to sleep after creating the poor.) I stood up from my seat and requested if he could oblige by singing that song and he agreed instantly. The rendition was so touchy that not only the entire audience but also Inayat himself burst into tears. The evening ended with 'Dharati sadi bhagaan wali' (Our land is a store house of good luck.) It was a song in praise of the motherland, written by Waris Ludhianvi and music composed by G. A. Chishti. Inayat had sung it originally for the film *Dharti ke lal* in chorus with Shokat Ali and Tasawur Khanam. That evening in Kotlakhpat every single person from the audience joined the chorus, the sound of which reverberated far beyond the high walls of the jail, perhaps right upto the Wagha Border.

A proper dinner for the inmates of the transit camp, the artists who performed for the evening, the Swiss embassy personnel, jail staff and some selected prisoners was the grand finale for the evening. (The feast was grand only from the jail standards and not otherwise.) It is during the dinner that I met someone whom I can easily call 'my counterpart' from the Pakistani side. He was Sheikh

Rashid urf Bhatti Darwaja Lahore, a tall well-built man, wearing specs and a multifaceted person who could read, write and speak Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Persian and Arabic with equal ease and fluency. Sheikh Rashid was also well-versed with the 'Gurumukhi' script and had not only read 'Guru Granth Sahib' but also knew some prominent verses by heart and could recite those in accordance with the musical notations ('Raag') prescribed for the purpose in the scripture. To test the veracity of his claims I took out the 'Gutka' presented to me by Bashir Ahmad in the Mianwali Jail and he could read and also give musical rendition of the verse that came by at random when the holy book was opened. Before opening the 'Gutka' he didn't forget to touch it to his forehead as a mark of respect as per *reht* and *maryada* (tradition and protocol).

Sheikh Rashid could guess that I was foxed to see a Muslim from Pakistan so well conversant with the Sikh scripture and *maryada*. "Don't be surprised," he advised and went on to add, "Just as you have been passing off as Salim in Pakistan for the sake of your employer back home in India, I have been passing off as a Sikh in India for my employers based here in Pakistan." Sheikh Rashid was serving time in jail on charges of printing counterfeit currency, but going by his own version his story was far deeper and complicated. A self-confessed agent of the Pakistani intelligence agency, his unique printing skills had also been utilized by the Pakistani agencies who used the counterfeit currency primarily for their agents infiltrating into the Indian Punjab for destrabilizing the State as revenge for dismemberment of Eastern Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. He showed me a number of group photographs of Sikhs who according to him were Pakistani Muslims in 'Sikh bana' (apparel) and well trained in Sikh *raht-maryada*. According to him the Pakistani agencies had a separate cell for the Indin Punjab that controlled the activities of these agents who not only carried huge quantities of counterfeit currency printed by Sheikh Rashid, but were also 'counterfeit Sikhs' themselves. The task given to these agents was to destabilize the Indian state by inciting the local Sikh population. The main target however was Indira Gandhi whom the Pakistani establishment held singularly responsible for the creation of Bangladesh. What Sheikh Rashid told about the common grand design of Pakistan, the CIA and China against Indira Gandhi was tallying in every detail

with what Hashim Qureshi had told me in Multan, except that Sheikh Rashid was more specific in certain respects. He even disclosed names of some opposition leaders from UP, Bihar, West Bengal and Punjab, who according to him had been won over by these agencies to work against the Indian Prime Minister. (Sheikh Rashid had mentioned names of some leaders, but I am avoiding those as I do not want to court controversy. In any case the objective of my book is to give my own story and not indulge in any politics.) The plan was to dethrone Indira Gandhi by spreading public disturbances through riots and strikes and some prominent opposition members from Bihar had been roped in for the purpose.

A spy is trained to doubt everything for his own safety. I too viewd Sheikh Rashid and whatever he said with suspicion. I thought he had been put after me as part of a calculated design by the jail authorities to elicit information from me or to plant information that I could disseminate further after I got back to India thereby contributing to the Pakistani propaganda without being on their pay rolls or without even knowing that I had become their instrument. How can he have such easy access to the inmates of the transit camp without connivance of the authorities, I wondered, but realised that the administration in the jail had become by and large lax for everyone and not just for any particular individual like Sheikh Rashid. I therefore thought it better to confront the man himself. "Why are you telling me all these stories?" I asiked him squarely one evening after he had narrated some of his exploits while working for the Pakistani agencies. Sheikh Rashid turned sad and serious.

"You know Amrik Singh, this intelligence is a dirty business. The agencies exploit the operatives like you and me and when they realize that the operative had ceased to be of any use, they simply dump him. In some cases, as it has happened to me the agencies behave viciously going to the extent of having the agent thrown behind bars on trumped up charges just to discredit and silence him once and for all. This happens when the agent commits the mistake of either demanding his due from the agencies or opens his mouth to spill the beans. I committed such a mistake by demanding that the Pakistani Punjabi Muslims put under the 'Sikh Bana' and trained in *Reht-Maryada* for infiltration into the Indian Punjab be given their due and paid in genuine currency rather than the pieces

of paper rolled out by me. The agencies warned me to keep my mouth shut or else face the consequences. I was stubborn and challenged the top brass in the agencies, who had me arrested on charges of printing counterfeit currency. Is it not ironical that they had me locked up precisely for doing what I had been doing all along for their own benefit and at their bidding. I printed every penny, which the Pakistani Punjabi Muslims turned Sikhs were given for use after their infiltration inside Indian Punjab. At times I was even tasked to print Pakistani counterfeit currency that the senior officers of the agencies used to pass off as genuine to their sources within Pakistan. It is this very skill, which was made into a criminal charge against me, and I find myself where you find me sitting today."

Sheikh Rashid also told me that before being sent to Kotlakhpat the agencies had kept him in their own custody in various safe houses where he was injected with some chemical substance, because of which he had developed an incurable skin disease. Pulling off his sleeves and trousers he showed me patches of decaying skin on his hands and feet which he claimed had been caused due to the substance injected forcibly in his body. Sheikh Rashid told me that the disease was irreversible and was spreading at an alarming rate all over his body. He feared that his days were numbered and he might die any time because of the poison. Crying bitterly and hiding his face behind his palms Sheikh Rashid swore that the only objective he had in his mind in narrating his story to me was to let the Indian people and Indian authorities know what all Pakistani agencies were doing against India and how unethical their attitude was towards their own men.

The spy in me was still stronger than the humane soul and I still was not prepared to take Sheikh Rashid for his word. I had my own doubts about the truthfulness of the stories churned out by him and certainly about the objectives he might have had in narrating those to me. My doubts were set at rest after just 2-3 weeks when Sheikh Rashid did not turn up at the usual time. I enquired from the Lumberdar who told me that Sheikh Rashid was no more and had actually already been buried in the graveyard nearby. The Lumberdar could not explain the reasons of his death except that he was suffering from some mysterious disease due to which his skin had started rotting and shrinking. "Perhaps he might have consumed poison and committed suicide," the Lumberdar guessed. It left me with

a heavy heart and a feeling of guilt for viewing Sheikh Rashid with suspicion. I prayed silently for his soul to rest in peace and do so even now whenever I think of that unfortunate man.

24

Freedom dawns at Long Last

During my long years of incarceration in Pakistan I had seen a clear pattern in the events happening to me. Before every positive development there would be a stint, howsoever brief, of intense frustration and agony and vice versa. The most fulfilling day of my career when I got the details about the field gun 'sherni' in Kasoor was followed by my arrest by the FIU men the same evening. After the shortlived tranquility during my custody in the quarter guard of the Baluch soldiers I was faced with the toughest and most cruel torture when beef was sought to be force-fed and the 'hot-plate treatment' was given. Close on the heels of the unspeakable torture in the 'ShahiQuila' came the unbelievable gesture of kindness from ASI Malik Mohammad Akram who whispered to me the short and sweet two lines of prayer his mother Shanti Devi believed could be a panacea for all my problems. I had to twice face the inhuman torture due to a whimsical jailor Mr. Jahangir Khan Hotiana and each time angels like Sheikh Ehsan Ghani and Chowdhary Nazir Ahmad succeeded him. One saved my life from the bullets of the machine gun a mad commander of the Pakistani Rangers had almost triggered and the other gave not just my long lost self-esteem, but also 15 days remission in my sentence for what he termed as excellent conduct.

After our arrival at Kotlakhpat, when I saw that the transit camp was proving to be a neverending party, I started suffering from an unknown fear about the future. Such feeling of inexplicable fear is common amongst those unfortunate people who spend long times in uncertainty and hardship. A psychiatrist might explain by merely terming it 'fear psychosis' or just plain insecurity, but for those who actually face it, it is a harsh reality that saps all the energy and inner strength human beings require for a normal and decent survival. The 'insecurity' has a devastating impact on a person's physical and mental health. Frequent mood-swings are perhaps

one of the most common and mildest forms of abnormality induced by it as a life-long scar. Our group in the transit camp at Kotlakhpat was no exception to the syndrome. We used to swing from acute depression to euphoria and absurd pessimism to illogical optimism. The problem aggravated when there was no news of our repatriation to India and all of us developed an oppressive feeling of having been stranded. As most of us (MI and IB operatives) were from the Punjab, we used to generally talk to each other in Punjabi. "Oye yaara, jadon jail vich sigai te ai pata si vai inne salaan tak iththe hi rehna hai. Hoon te ma ye koi pata hi nahin lagda vai kadon eththun bahr nikalna hai. Je sanu vapas India na bhejya te innahne mayiyye ess campda time saja vich vi nahin man na. Pher te bura hi hoya na?" (When we were serving time in jail we atleast knew precisely how long we are going to be behind bars. Now even that is not known. By the way, if we aren't repatriated the Pakistani authorities may not even count the time spent in this stupid camp towards our jail term. Isn't that bad?). The Swiss embassy staff wasn't very forthcoming. "Things are being worked out," is all they would commit. Bhimsen and I once asked the Warder if he could give us any news. "Dekhoji mai ta hun ki dassan sivay iss de ke hukam aan de vaad assi darwaja kholan vich koi tem nahin lana." (What can I say except that we won't take any time in opening the gate after the orders come from above.)

I had a gut feeling that the acute phase of depression that had suddenly gripped us could well nigh be the harbinger of better news. I wasn't wrong. After a few days a Swiss embassy staffer gave me a list of 180 names, which according to him had been finalized for repatriation. As the list prepared by Bhimsen and me contained some 200 names I wanted to know why the names of 20 odd persons had been excluded. "Remember Kishori lal alias Amarjrrt Singh alias Mohammad Salim, you are only a volunteer for helping us complete the paper work. Please be within your limits and don't act as the High Commissioner of India in Pakistan. Is that OK Excellency," she said sarcastically emphasing 'Excellency'. "I am sorry," I said and hurriedly glanced through the list to make sure that the four 'paagals' had been included in the list given to me. I felt happy that they were there. As instructed by the Swiss embassy staffer Bhimsen and I passed the word round for the 180 persons as per the list to be ready to move to the border ar short notice.

The repatriation was to be in small batches of 30-40 persons and staggered over a period. Those whose names were excluded were a worried lot, but every one including the Swiss staff assured them that some updating of the list was still going on and they might be lucky after all.

There was excitement in the air as the hour of redemtion was not very far. The camp wore a festive look and every one was full of hope. The MI and IB operatives had been through long periods of seperation from their families and most of the fishermen were concerned that their friends and relatives might be worried as no one would guess that they were in jail in Pakistan. For those left behind in their villages they had simply gone missing and might have drowned or fallen prey to the sea pirates, a phenomenon common in the Arabian sea for centuries.

The festivities became boisterous when the names of first batch were announced some time in August 1974. They were told to gather at the main gate where a bus was waiting to take them to Wagah. (The Indo-Pak border near Amritsar in the Indian Punjab.) Soon after lining up, the inmates spontaneously burst into loud chants of "Bole so Nihal Sat Sri Akal" and "Jaikara Sheran wali da". Mohan Lall Bhaskar, Vasdev, Inderjeet Singh were some of the prominent names included in the first batch in addition to some fishermen whose launch was captured by the Pakistanis near Karachi. They were told to move one by one as the jail staff announced their names. I was given a copy of the list and my job was to cross-check the names. As the bus moved all eyes became moist. It was an emotional moment when even some jail staff had tears in their eyes. The four 'paagals' on board as part of the first batch were the darlings of everyone. They looked foxed, ill at ease and didn't seem to know what was happening.

At meal time in the evening the camp looked quite incomplete in the absence of the inmates who had gone off in the first batch. Everyone was feeling nostalgic about the 'paagals' who by their innocuous antics kept our spirits alive. We were wondering if they would recognize their family members on crossing the border or whether any one would be there at all to receive them as they had not been able to give exact details of their home and families in India. I suddenly heard as if the Bangali was standing behind me and calling, "Captain *saab*, give me a

cigarette." I thought it was hallucination induced by memory as we were talking and thinking about the man, but found him actually standing behind and tapping me on my shoulder. The lumberdar told that all the four 'paagals' had been returned, as the Indian authorities didn't accept them because they couldn't provide their personal details in the absence of which verification was not possible. Inspite of mental derangement, I could clearly see lines of dejection upon his face and tears resting just on the edges of his eyes. The other three were perceptibly dejected as they neither spoke to any one nor had a single morsel to eat. We all felt sad for them and the joyous excitement had vanished from the camp.

The second batch had 30-40 names. These included Mulkh Raj, Tirath Ram, Joh Masih, etc. As Bhimsen had already gone in the first batch, I was left alone for assisting the Swiss embassy staff in doing the paper work and other related administrative duties. I was therefore told that I would be sent only with the last and final batch and must wait. The turn of the third and last batch came shortly afterwards. Ashok Kumar of Pathankot, Rajinder Gupta of Jammu, Avtar Singh from Amritsar and a deaf and dumb Sikh detainee whose particulars I can't recall now were included in the batch in addition to some Hyderabadi fishermen. My name too figured in the list. My happiness at the prospects of being united with my long lost family was diluted considerably when I thought of the plight of the four 'paagals' who were to be left behind perhaps for all the times to come. I was concerned, as they had developed a special attachment for me because of which I too had learnt how to persuade them for food and calm them down whenever they flew into a rage. We couldn't bid a final good-bye to them as they had already been put in a cell and bar-fettered 'to avoid any kind of nuisance.'

25

Mera Bharat Mahan:
My India is Great

Our bus took more than one and a half hours in negotiating the short distance from Kotlakhpat (Lahore) to the Wagah Border. Perhaps it had instructions to go slow. At the border we were not allowed to get down as some 'adam problems' (slang common in the forces for 'administrative problems') were reportedly being sorted out. After a long wait that seemed like eternity, the bus moved back to Kotlakhpat. The driver or the escorts wouldn't utter a word to say what precisely had happened. On reaching Kotlakhpat we were told that tension had again gripped Indo-Pak relations because "India ne atom bomb test kitta hai" (India has tested a nuclear bomb). While our current status continued to be that of 'transit camp inmates,' the Swiss embassy staffer told us that the condition was fluid and if tension between the neighbors escalated further the agreement for prisoners'exchange might be called off, in which case we would revert back to our original status of convicts. The news was so horrifying that none of us could maintain our calm any more. Each one of us cried bitterly. I cried aloud banging my head against the wall and pulling my hair violently to give vent to my frustration. If this was what was destined for us then why did God delude us with that short-lived flicker of hope when we were brought from Mianwali Jail to this camp. Isn't it deception and divine deception at that, I asked myself. But for this brief divine deception we had reconciled to the life of a convict and prepared ourselves for serving the sentence as passed by the civil court and the court martial. Why did this break have to come and leave us shattered as never before?

It is in these trying moments that we saw the human face of our Pakistani brethren. Everyone from the Jail Superintendent down to the Lumberdars offered words of consolation. "Kaka, Allah da bharosa rakho. Usne sab khair karna hai.

Assi saare twahde phravan vang haan. Saddi duty de kuchh takaje ne varna assi kede twahde dushman haan," (Have faith in God. He shall see you through your problems. We are like your brothers but we have the compulsions of our duty otherwise we are not your enemies) the elderly lumberdar kept consoling us. By morning the entire group had become normal except that we had ceased to talk to each other or to the jail or Swiss embassy staff. My mind had become completely numb as I had become indifferent to pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow. After a few days therefore when word came that the problems had been sorted out and we were to leave for Wagah border, the next day I had no feelings. The usual chirpy atmosphere in the buses and vans ferrying us from quarter guard to quarter guard and jail to jail from time to time was missing, as we moved from Kotlakhpat to Wagah. We didn't even bid good-bye to the warders and lumberdars while leaving the prison. "Ki bharosa vapas murh ke aa jaavangai," (Where is the guarantee that we won't return) I told the lumberdar who wasn't actually amused. "Allah kare twahnun itthe na hi aana paye," (I pray to God that you don't have to return) the lumberdar replied affectionately.

I was still cold and emotionless when it was announced that we had reached Wagah and were told to get down from the bus. After getting down we had to walk some distance. Suddenly I saw the border gate with the Pakistani soldiers standing attentively and their Indian counterparts just across. The Pakistani flag was fluttering atop the gate and the Indian tricolor on the otherside of the fence. I also saw large crowds sitting on the Indian side waving at us, eventhough they could only have a faint glimpse of us. The site of the Indian tricolor, the smartly turned out Jawans of our security forces in their well-starched uniforms, and the crowd of onlookers waiving at us suddenly made me restive and impatient. My mind was filled with memories of my family and home in nearby Jullundur. I had left home for the mission in the middle of 1966. On 14th September 1966 the FIU team had captured me at Kasoor. Today was the 18th September 1974. It had been more than eight years since I was separated from my family. My father was a sensitive person with a delicate, almost fragile health. My mother, though strong of heart and mind was so deeply attached to me that the separation of these long years could have been devastating for her. How would they be now?

My elder brother Bholanath's daughter Vinu was a shy little girl and my younger brother Mohinder was rapidly shooting up as a tall handsome boy on the verge of finishing his civil engineering diploma and soon to be on the lookout for some job when I left home eight years ago. Now that I was almost back in India I wanted to see them without losing a moment.

We were all queed up and being marched one by one across the Pakistani line over to the Indian side. The Pakistani and the Indian authorities were sitting across each other in their respective sides with necessary (or may be unnecessary) documentation. As a person crossed over, the Pakistanis announced his name loudly. The officers on the Indian side looked through the papers and quizzed the person briefly perhaps to reassure that the person was indeed an Indian national. It is these few moments of scrutiny by our own side that gave maximum tension to those who were still waiting for their turn. What if they decline to accept you? Where do you go in that case? The Pakistanis in any case have confirmed that you are not a Pakistani and worse still that you are an Indian. The Indians saying sorry we don't accept you would perhaps be the worst thing to happen under the circumstances. Perhaps this is what had happened to the four 'paagals' who had been thrown back in the barracks at Kotlakhpat, fettered for the rest of their lives.

During my short stint with the MI I had crossed the border between India and Pakistan more than a dozen times, but had never felt so nervous and anxious which was strange as unlike all the previous ones this was the only border crossing I was not doing illegally. I was carefully watching the facial gestures and the deportment of the Indian officer quizzing the aspirants before they were allowed entry into the country. Suddenly the Pakistani escort gave me a mild push and proclaimed, "Mohammad Salim alias Amrik Singh alias Kishori Lal, Village and Post Office Nanda Chur, Police Station Hariana, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab, India." As I was lost in my own thoughts, with the slight push given by my Pakistani escort I saw myself on the Indian side. I couldn't believe myself and lay prostrate touching my forehead to the ground and kissing it repeatedly chanted at the same time, "Jai Matadi" rapidly and repeatedly. I then got up and started walking over. Two constables of the Punjab police stopped me. A police officer, Dy.SP Bhandari

standing nearby gave me a hard look from top to bottom and said, "O kitthe chalyan? Vai tere inne saare te naun hain, tu hai kaun apni shinakht te karva pailan" (Where are you going? You have so many aliases at least give your identification before proceeding further.) I was reminded of the story of the four 'paagals' who were returned from the border as the Indian authorities couldn't identify them and was nervous. I was lucky. Today was my day. Before I could reply to the Dy.SP, a gentleman in civil clothes appearing to be some powerful functionary of the State intervened. "Bhandari ainu ann dei, ai apna banda hai" (Don't stop him Bhandari, he is our man). He was Mr. Bedi, the then DC of Amritsar as I learnt later on. I also learnt that his intervention was due to my younger brother Mohinder, who had joined the Defence Estate Department and whose boss, Mr.Rajinder Kumra had already briefed the DC about me.

I was delighted at the DC's positive intervention and thought I would be going straight way to my home but that was not to be. Soon after letting me in the Dy.SP instructed that I stay put in a small enclosure along with those who had crossed over ahead of me. A few men from the PAP guarded the enclosure. I insisted that I be allowed to go home as none other than the DC himself had already identified me. "Hoon ki shyapa ho gaya je," (What's the problem now) I said irritatedly. "Oye chup vi kar. Halle te assi shinakhat the tasdiq karni hai" (Shut up! We have yet to verify the identification details) the Dy. SP was apparently unimpressed. I felt a massive jolt in my mind. During the time I spent in the transit camp I used to imagine that we shall get a hero's' welcome on crossing over to the motherland from the Wagah Border. The respect and importance the Swiss embassy personnel and the jail staff gave by assigning a variety of administrative duties to me had heightened my expectations for a standing ovation from my countrymen on arrival. My first experience turned out to be just the contrary. From the manner the Dy. SP spoke I felt as if I was a common criminal who had been extradited for facing justice and answer for the crimes committed. Once again it was the ICRC that sought to redeem our self-esteem pulling us back from the brink as it were. Their volunteers appeared with broad smiles on their faces carrying trays of steaming hot tea and biscuits 'to welcome the repatrees.' Tea over, we were again herded to the Amritsar Central Jail of all places for 'tasdiq of shinakhat' (police verification of our identification).

What an anti—climax, I said to myself. In stead of a standing ovation or even the most ordinary reception, I found myself detained in a small enclosure guarded by armed police just after my entry into my great country India. I was able to locate my elder brother Bholanath sitting at a distance and waving enthusiastically at me. There was another young man sitting by his side who, I guessed could be my younger brother Mohinder. A young girl holding an infant in her arms was also waving but I couldn't guess who she was. It wasn't possible to guess either, as she was the shy little girl Vinu, daughter of my elder brother. She had been married and recently blessed with a baby girl. I felt uneasy within on noticing that my parents weren't there. My eyes kept searching them in the crowd as I was sure they must be some where around and only I wasn't able to locate them. I kept on rubbing my eyes repeatedly and trying to look as far as my vision could reach but simply found no one who could even remotely resemble my parents. I was now feeling sad and worried about their health and even scared if something untoward might have happened to them. I started gesturing to my brother to find out why our parents weren't there but they couldn't convey, the message as I proved to be as bad at making the gesture as he was at reading it. I could see my brother pleading with the Dy.SP for permission to come over and talk to me, but the request was apparently turned down. Perhaps freedom had not yet dawned and the situation was as helpless as it could be in Kotlakhpat, Kasoor, Mianwali or Multan—perhaps even worse.

After everyone had crossed over and the tea party thrown by ICRC was over we were taken to the Amritsar Central jail. The sight of the high walls of the jail, the klinkling sound of the barfetters and the depressing sight of the lumberdars moving around in the prisoners' uniform was too much to bear after all the trials and tribulations we had faced in Pakistan. I would have gone into deep deprerssion, but was saved once again because of the interventionof the DC, Mr.Bedi. My brothers and mother got permission to visit me in jail. The moment I saw my mother we both started crying. One look at her face and I knew that my father was no more. We were still crying when a warder came to announce that the verification process for me was over and I was free to leave for home. My brother had arranged for

an Army jeep from his office in which I left for home. Enroute I wanted to take a small detour to my younger brother's office and thank his boss for putting in a word to the DC for my early release. His colleagues quickly organized a small party to celebrate my retrurn.

We were no longer in the home that was ours when I left for Pakistan in 1966. After my father's death the family had to shift to a smaller apartment in Kasturba Nagar, Jullundur. When I reached this new home it wore a festive look with the entire complex lit up and covered with colorful festoons. It was a full house as my friends, our family friends and relatives had come in large numbers to see me and congratulate my mother for her son's safe return.

I was feeling weak and exhausted. "Son ja puttar, bada kamjor lagda hai. Tainu both musibatan jhelni payiyaan ne," (Go to sleep son. You are looking very weak. You must have been through very difficult times), my mother said with the affection no one except her was capable of having. "What happened to father," I asked her. "Your father was a sensitive person. He couldn't bear the trauma caused by the news of your arrest in Pakistan," she replied without showing off her emotions. I recalled she was the only one in the family who knew that I had joined the MI and to her alone had I informed that I was leaving for Amritsar from where I was to cross-over to Pakistan on a mission. I asked her how did father know that I had gone to Pakistan or that I was arrested there. From what she told me I gathered that when I didn't turn up for nearly six months my father insisted on lodging a missing report with the police. As my mother was aware of my MI connection and also about my mission inside Pakistan, she dissuaded him from doing so and met Col. Bhatti instead. After initial denials Col. Bhatti admitted that MI had given some task to me inside Pakistan, where according to information obtained by him from his sources I had been arrested. He however denied that I was ever employed by the MI. "Your son volunteered for the mission and was fully aware of the risks involved. The MI has no responsibility for whatever has happened and owns no liability for any compensation as he was not our employee," the Colonel had curtly told my mother who had to then confide everything to my father. When my father met Col.Bhatti, he reiterated that the MI owed no duty or responsibility towards his missing son. What my father couldn't endure was an

ignonimous offer made by the Col. for "some money from the secret funds of the MI if you keep your mouth shut". My father narrated the story to my mother and died within weeks of it. "Bhatti thinks I am so mean that I will sell off my own son for money," he kept on telling my mother.

"Your father was a senior functionary of the MES and well known in the army circles in Jullundur. Most Army officers posted in the station had come to attend his funeral or the 'kirya' (condolence meeting) on the third day. The only notable absentee on both the occasions was Col.Bhatti," my mother grieved. Col.Bhatti, nay the entire MI outfit was the notable absentee at Wagah border as well at the time of my return, I realised.

I continued to make concerted efforts to contact Col. Bhatti after my retrurn but couldn't succeed until after his retirement when he contested the Punjab Assembly election as an independent candidate from Jullundur and mercifully, lost. The Colonel refused to recognize me and on being reminded of my association with him when he was the CO of the MI at Jullundur, he briskly walked away stating that he has no longer anything to do with the army or the MI. At the time of my repatriation Colonel Bhatti was posted out of Jullundur, but the office obviously had some record of my association with MI as some JCOs and NCOs started regularly visiting my house threatening me that if I opened my mouth and said anything about my association with the MI, the consequences wouldn't be good for me or my family's safety. Occasionally the visitors also offered me monetary compensation if I agreed to share some percentage of it with them. More than this there was nothing that the MI did or was willing to do.

26

Epilogue

When my mother sympathized with me for the difficult times I must have been through, she perhaps didn't know that the difficult times weren't over yet as. She wasn't aware of the pain I felt when contrary to my hopes for a decent reception on crossing the border at Wagah I was detained in the Central Jail pending verification of my identity and my brothers and sister weren't allowed to communicate with me except through gestures from a distance. My pain and frustration was no less when I realized that the MI had not bothered to contact me after my return, just as they didn't bother to offer a few words of consolation when my family got the news of my arrest in Pakistan or when my father died. All efforts made by me to contact them were frustrating as no senior officer would agree to grant me a personal interview and the junior level functionaries – JCOs and NCOs – pretended to be clueless. Their unscrupulousness was evident when they offered financial assistance in lieu of a cut for themselves. When I turned down the offer they started visiting my place regularly, only to threaten that I would be implicated in some criminal case and put behind bars for the rest of my life if I spoke to anyone about my links with the MI or my mission to Pakistan. It reminded me of my counterpart in Pakistan, Sheikh Rashid of Bhatti Darwaja Lahore who died in Kotlakhpat jail of some mysterious skin ailment. The establishment on either side appeared to be the same with almost identical victims for an equally identical 'service to the motherland'.

Why did I join the MI? I had started doubting the fundamental rationale of not just my individual decision but also the very purpose of the existence of the agencies on either side of the Indo-Pak divide. I joined it for the sake of some 'spectacular service to the motheriand'as everyone from Bhimsen to Ustadji, CO saab and the old man would have me believe. That the decision turned out to be

an unmitigable disaster was undoubtedly beyond debate, was clear from all that followed thereafter. What I got in the bargain was arrest, torture and incarceration in Pakistan with none of the promised help coming my way. For about a year after my return I did nothing but running from pillar to post without any tangible results. The officials would listen to my story, sympathise with me, but offer nothing more than a few words of unsolicited counsel 'to not feel demoralized as good times and bad times are two sides of the same coin'.

The mutual bonding in my family was impeccable as we were still a joint family and younger members respectfully obeyed the elders, but I realized that while every othe male member of the family was gainfully employed, I was becoming a burden being jobless. The MI had already disowned me and no other department of the government was willing to help. Wasn't it ironical that ASI Malik Akram, Chowdhary Nazir Ahmad, Sheikh Ehsan Ghani, Lumberdars Gulkhan Pathan and Umarkhan and Warder Baba Sher were less indifferent or hostile than some of my own compatriots who started looking the other way when I needed them the most. I felt overwhelmed whenever I remembered those friendly souls. I also felt haunted by the memories of the four 'paagals' whom Dy. SP Bhandari or someone else in his place had refused to take back as they couldn't account for themselves.

Brooding was no solution to any of my problems as I was still only 29 years old and had to cater for the whole life ahead of me. Therefore, after a brief hibernation I stood up again chanting my favorite verse from the Gita, "Na dainyam na cha palayanam". I was a trained automobile Engineer and had no dearth of jobs in a resurgent Punjab where industrialization was taking place on a rapid scale. Instead of being an advantage, my MI association proved to be a liability, as after an elaborate interview in which I invariably impressed the prospective employer with my professional competence, they tended to flinch the moment they got to know that I had been a 'spy'. On a couple of occasions, when I concealed this dubious distinction, the employers came down doubly revengeful as I was not only a one time 'spy' but had also suppressed this fact before joining. It was after I slogged hard to make a reputation for myself in the automobile circles of Punjab's industrial towns

that I finally settled down in my present job. If I have succeeded in piecing together the broken threads of life, it is not because of my past employment as an Indian spy in Pakistan— my is inspite of it.

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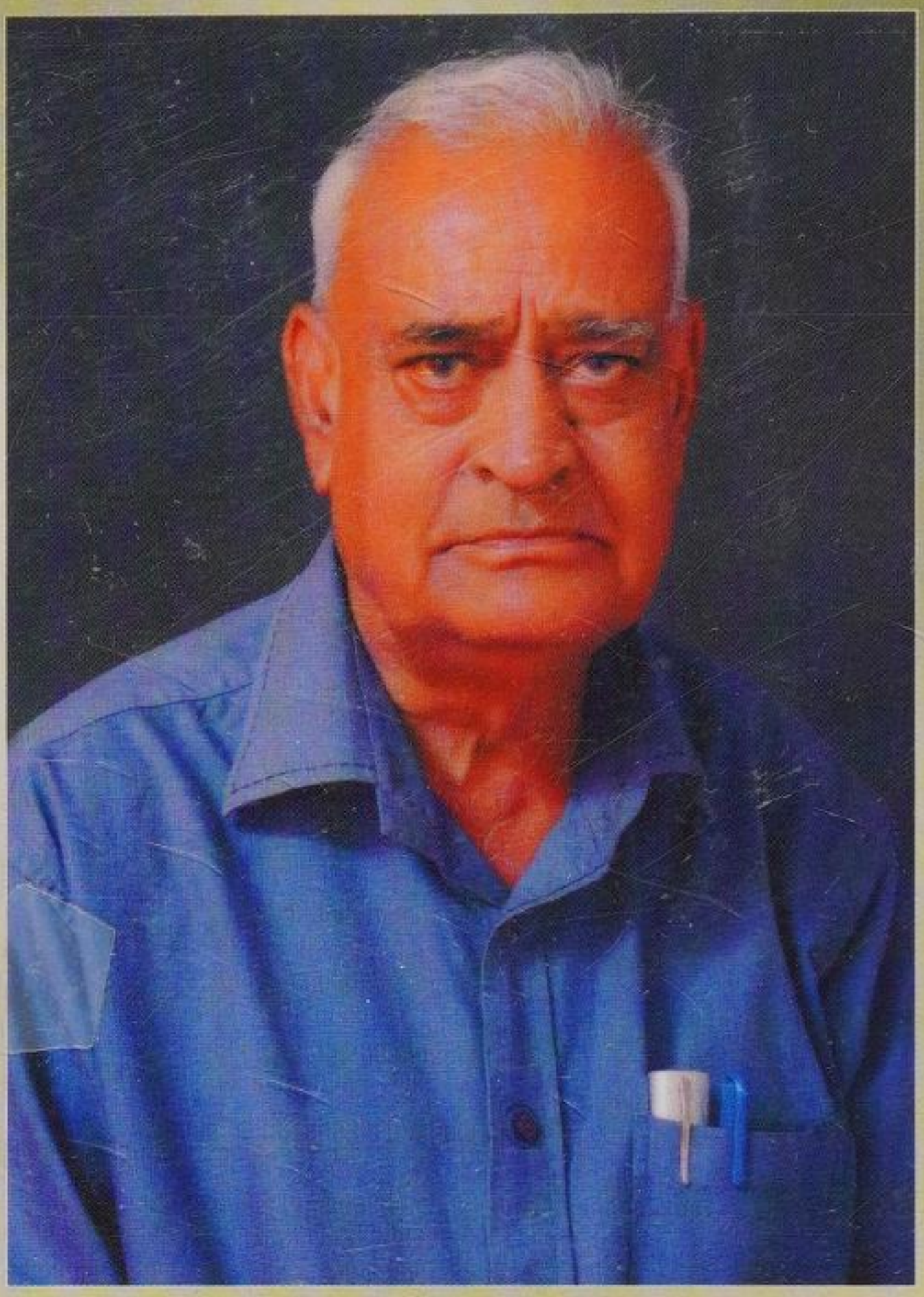

"To a prisoner like me and others, death seems to be the deliverance. They torture you in every manner and at that stage you would like to die — but they won't let you. But if you escape death and are sent back to your country, you die a slow death as nobody comes forward to own you. And others are not as lucky as me, as most spies are not educated and they can not survive if the government and intelligence agencies do not come to their help; and they never do help because of the selfishness and unprofessional approach of the concerns of corrupt officers of their agencies. Terrorist organizations are better than intelligence agencies: at least they accept the identities of their people and take care of the families of their members in the case of death, besides compensating them handsomely with money and moral support."

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